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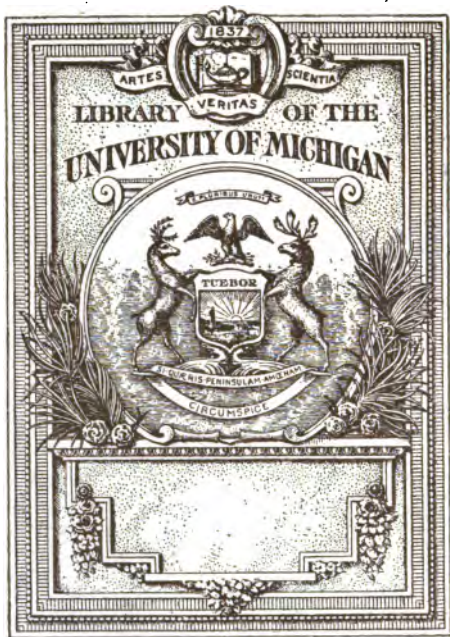
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## THE

# PLEASURES OF RELIGION.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE PLEASURES WHICH CONSTITUTE TRUE HAPPINESS.

THE first duty of every intelligent and accountable being is, to glorify the Author of his existence, by cherishing towards him supreme and ardent affection, and by rendering to him the tribute of cheerful and unreserved obedience. But the duty of glorifying the blessed God, is not in the least opposed to the cultivation of our own happiness. He "for whom are all things, and by whom are all things," is the God of love. Benevolence is that distinguished glory of his character which he displays with the highest complacency. He delights in the communication of happiness; he makes his appeal perpetually to the desire of happiness implanted in every mind; he invites to the pursuit of happiness; and he graciously condescends to expostulate with those who are disposed to seek after happiness, by a course which must terminate in disappointment. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come

ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.—Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” Isa. lv. 1—3, 7.

Yielding ourselves, then, to the infallible guidance of God’s own word, and humbly imploring the aid of the Spirit of wisdom, to guide us into all truth, let us enter on the consideration of *the pleasures which constitute true happiness*. Should it be asked, what is included under the term *happiness*, as distinguished from *pleasure*, let it be replied, that, by happiness, we understand, a state of habitual enjoyment, arising from a continued succession of such pleasurable feelings as the mind deliberately approves.

The inquiry on which we now enter, regards the happiness of man in the present world. If, then, we would arrive at any satisfactory results, we must keep in mind the present constitution and the actual condition of man. He is a being not altogether corporeal, nor alto-

gether spiritual; but constituted in part of matter, and in part of mind. Let it not, even for a moment, escape our notice, that he is a degenerate and apostate being, destitute of that purity, dignity, and felicity, which originally distinguished his nature, and displaying, with awful prominence, characteristics the very reverse. Unless these views of human nature be steadily retained before the eye of the mind, no inquiry into the subject proposed can possibly be conducted to a successful termination. It is not, then, surprising, that so little light is thrown upon the path of happiness by many of our philosophic writers, who have offered their guidance; since, in reference to their conceptions of the moral condition of man, it may be justly said, "The light which is in them is darkness."

It appears to me, that happiness, so far as it is attainable in the present life, is to be derived from four distinct sources of enjoyment: it is derivable,

FIRST, From the removal of the evils which are incompatible with happiness.

Man, as a sinner against God, lies under awful disqualifications for the enjoyment of true happiness. Two of these, if not removed by Divine interposition, must be fatal to his best attempts.

The first of these is, the curse which attaches to guilt.

It is written in the volume which never misleads us—"Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in

the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 10. Is there upon the face of the earth a man "who doeth good, and sinneth not," and never has sinned? Eccl. vii. 20. Lives there an individual who has not become subject to that curse? Can then a feeble, dependent, mortal man be happy and secure, while exposed to the curse of the Almighty? Can he be happy with the full consciousness of transgressions unnumbered and unforgiven, and with the forebodings of a day of judgment—of a day of wrath? Would he be happy, let him enter on the momentous, the appropriate inquiry—"How shall man be just with God?" And if the lights of nature and of moral science conduct him not to the desired discovery, let him search the Scriptures which testify of Jesus, and learn from the history of a sin-atoning Saviour, the wondrous means by which the curse may be removed far away from the offender, even by the redeeming blood of Him who was "made a curse for us." Gal. iii. 13. Are you engaged in the pursuit of happiness? Be assured that the very first step in the only road which leads to its attainment, is an approach to the God of mercy, by faith in the only Mediator, who himself was "made sin for us," though he "knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." 2 Cor. v. 21. Approach, exulting in the joyous persuasion, that now God can be just while "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Rom. iii. 26.

A second disqualification for happiness is,

the incapacity for true enjoyment, which arises from a depraved heart.

It is the assertion of an inspired apostle, that the unrenewed mind is enmity against God, and that it neither is, nor can be subject to the Divine law. Can, then, such a mind be happy? Can it be happy, when directly opposed to the principles of purity, and the requirements of rectitude? Can it be happy, when in determined hostility of feeling and of character against that adorable Being, who is himself the fountain of blessedness? It cannot be! By the very nature of things, by the direct tendencies of its own inclinations and passions, as well as by the righteous and irreversible determination of God, such a mind must remain destitute of happiness, unless it be transformed and renewed. But for the very purpose of this renovation, is there not the promise of an omnipotent agency? Is there not in the economy of redeeming love, a sanctifying Spirit, as well as an atoning Saviour? Are not his vivifying and purifying influences most graciously promised to the earnest suppliant? Must not every individual of the human race continue under an incapacity for happiness, unless he be renewed in the spirit of his mind? Eph. iv. 23. On this point there rests no uncertainty. It is thus decided by the Son of God himself—"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," John iii. 2; he must of necessity remain a stranger to the happiness of that kingdom, both as it regards the reign of grace

on earth, and the reign of glory in heaven. Important, then, beyond expression, in the very outset of our present inquiries, is the question, Are our disqualifications for the attainment of true happiness removed? Are our consciences tranquillized by faith in the divine propitiation, and our hearts renewed by the power of the Spirit of holiness?

The SECOND source of happiness, to which I would direct your attention, is, The pursuit of the greatest good which we can attain or desire. This good includes,

1. The favour of God on earth.

Of those who are engaged in the pursuit of happiness, many, under the influence of a strange infatuation, bring themselves under the "woe" denounced against those "who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." Isa. v. 20. How many are perpetually captivated by the semblance of good, where the reality is altogether wanting! How many are daily chargeable with these two evils—with forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to themselves broken cisterns which can hold no water? Jer. ii. 13. How many are constantly spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not! Isa. lv. 2. But while many are saying, "Who will show us any good?" happy are they who are divinely instructed to say, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us; for thy favour is

life, and thy loving-kindness is better than life;—Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul!" Psa. iv. 6; xxx. 5; lxiii. 3; lxxiii. 25; Lam. iii. 24. Who, can adequately describe the happiness to be derived, from the believing, the admiring, the adoring contemplation of the blessed God, when we can say, on a view of his amiable and his awful attributes, "This God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide, even unto death." Psa. xlviii. 14. Must it not be conducive to my happiness to believe, that there reigns on the throne of the universe a Being who is the uncreated source of all that is great and good, and lovely and excellent? Can it be otherwise than delightful to me to know, that he takes delight in the production of happiness; and to be assured, that his omnipotence is under the direction of wisdom which cannot err, equity which cannot be impeached, and goodness never weary of dispensing favours? Must not my heart glow with joyous emotions, on the discovery, that he confers benefits worthy of his boundless resources, not only on beings who never sinned, but also on creatures who have rebelled against him, and evinced the enmity of their hearts by the daring wickedness of their lives? Can my mind be habitually engaged in the contemplation of this love which passeth knowledge, without deriving from the survey ineffable delight? Truly it is good for me to draw near to him who con-

descends to invite me to his throne; who encourages my approach by granting me the Spirit of adoption, and by "the light of his countenance" becomes himself my exceeding joy!

The supreme good, which the well-directed pursuit of happiness requires us to seek, includes,

2. The enjoyment of God in heaven.

"In his presence is fulness of joy; at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Psa. xvi. 11. To see him in his unveiled glory, and to behold that glory in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, must be the full consummation of blessedness. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them; and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Rev. xxi. 3, 4. Can there, then, be any source of present joy so conducive to happiness, as this glorious prospect of futurity? He who cherishes and is authorized to cherish this animating expectation, has constantly before him the prospect of realizing all the blessedness which his heart can desire, or his most soaring imagination conceive! He has habitually before his eyes an object of supreme importance, stimulating to perpetual activity, and exciting to all that is honourable, amiable, and useful; while it



sustains, by most powerful consolations, under all the troubles of this transitory state. "Rejoicing in hope of the glory of God," Rom. v. 2, he can say, even amidst the severest afflictions of life, "The Lord is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation," Isa. xii. 2.

"Thou art the source and centre of all minds,  
 Their only point of rest, eternal Word!  
 From thee departing they are lost and rove  
 At random, without honour, hope, or peace.  
 From thee is all that soothes the life of man,  
 His high endeavour and his glad success,  
 His strength to suffer and his will to serve.  
 But O, thou bounteous Giver of all good,  
 Thou art of all thy gifts thyself the crown!  
 Give what thou canst, without thee we are poor;  
 And with thee rich, take what thou wilt away."

In due subordination to these primary and essential sources of happiness, I would direct your thoughts,

THIRDLY, To the temperate enjoyment of the inferior pleasures provided for man in his present state of existence.

There are three aspects under which we may regard man, whilst an inhabitant of the present world; and under each of these aspects we shall discover appropriate provision for his enjoyment. We may contemplate man as a sensitive being—as an intellectual being—and as a social being.

1. Let us take a view of his sensitive nature.

With regard to the pleasures of the senses, two of the most celebrated sects of Grecian philosophers, the Epicureans and the Stoics,

maintained opinions directly at variance with each other, while both were at variance with the truth. The Epicureans taught, that happiness consists primarily in the pleasures of the senses; the Stoics contended, that to the pleasures of the senses we ought to cherish the most perfect indifference, that sensitive pleasure is not in the least a good, and that the feeling of pain is not in itself an evil. Both these systems are radically false; and it has been well observed, that "if the philosophy of Epicurus err more grossly, the philosophy of the Stoical school, though it err more sublimely, is still but a sublime error." To require us to be alike indifferent to pleasure and to pain, is to proceed on entire ignorance of the very constitution of human nature, and of the benevolent design of its author. Do we not derive a most powerful argument in proof of the benevolence of the Déity, from the admirable adaptation of the world around us, to the structure of our corporeal frame, and especially to the delicate and susceptible organs of sensation? Had not God designed by this arrangement, to promote even our sensitive gratification, as Dr. Paley justly observes, he might have made "every thing we tasted bitter, every thing we saw loathsome, every thing we touched a sting, every smell offensive, and every sound a discord." Since, on the contrary, in the exuberance of his goodness, he has rendered every organ of sensation an inlet to delight, it would betray culpable ingratitude, as well as pitiable delusion to

cherish a spirit of Stoical apathy and indifference. "He who has lavished on us so many means of delight, as to make it impossible for us, in the ordinary circumstances of life, not to be sensitively happy in some greater or less degree, has not made nature so full of beauty that we should not admire it. He has not poured fragrance and music around us, and strewed with flowers the very turf on which we tread, that our heart may not rejoice, as we move along; that we may walk through this world of loveliness with the same dull eye and indifferent soul, with which we should have traversed unvaried scenes without a colour, or an odour, or a song."

Since, however, the pleasures of the senses are, by the majority of mankind, pursued with undue ardour, and indulged to criminal excess, it is important to keep in mind the limitations within which alone they can be legitimately enjoyed, and within which alone they can be conducive to our happiness. They are contributory to our happiness, only when they are not purchased at the expense of health, or peace, or principle; when they are enjoyed with a temperance and moderation, which will guard against the danger of impairing our capacity for nobler pleasures; when they are the occasion of calling forth gratitude of heart to the bounteous Giver of all good; and when we are prepared to resign them at his call, and, without hesitation or repining, to practise self-denial in every instance which conscience and duty may demand.

Man is to be regarded,

2. As an intellectual being.

There is a pleasure attendant on the very exercise of our faculties, whether corporeal or mental; and this pleasure rises, in proportion to the dignity and elevation of the faculties themselves. The acquisition of knowledge affords delight, by rousing to vigorous exertion our intellectual powers, as well as by stimulating and gratifying that principle of curiosity, which is so deeply and so universally implanted in our nature. We feel a desire to know, and we are highly gratified by knowing the history of the ages which are past, and of the generations now mingled with the dust; the character, the manners, and the transactions of other nations, in distant parts of the world, contemporary with ourselves; the scenery and the productions of countries we never expect to visit; the natural history of the various tribes of animals peculiar to their respective climates and elements; the laws which regulate the phenomena of the heavens, and the earth, and the ocean; and the treasures of science, reduced by the wisdom of enlightened men to systematic forms, and applied to purposes of practical utility. Pleasures, arising from sources such as these, are interdicted by no law; and when they do not unduly engross the mind, so as to impede the performance of incumbent duties, they are not only allowable, but desirable. They are of an order far more elevated and refined than the pleasures of the senses. While sensitive

gratifications are diminished by repetition, these are ever on the increase; these are ever within our power; these may afford recreation in fatigue, welcome relief from the turmoil of a boisterous world, and interesting occupation in the hours of occasional leisure.

But what species of knowledge, considered as a source of intellectual pleasure, can be so interesting or so delightful to the mind, as that which is connected with the interests and the prospects of immortality, with the glorious Author of our being, and with the history of redeeming mercy, engaged in the preparation of a world of ever-during blessedness! Surely of all the sources of human knowledge to which man has access, while an inhabitant of earth, none can admit of comparison, in point of interest or importance, with the disclosures of Divine revelation on the things which belong to his eternal peace. If the first principles of wisdom have found a place in our hearts, we cannot hesitate to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord." Phil. iii. 8

Man is to be regarded,

3. As a social being.

Every creature endowed with consciousness appears to derive pleasure from associating with other beings of his own species. The social principle is one of the universal characteristics of the human family. No one calls in question the truth first asserted by our Creator; "It is not good that man should be alone." Gen. ii. 18. Man derives pleasure

from the very aspect of the illuminated countenance of a fellow-creature; still more from the interchange of thought and feeling; most of all from mutual offices of kindness and of love. It is in the society of his fellow-men that scope is given for the enjoyment of some of the purest delights, for the excitement of the most generous affections, for the culture of the tenderest sympathies, and for the performance of the most beneficent actions. Exquisite and inexpressible are the joys which spring from the intimate relations of social and domestic endearment, when mutual love and mutual confidence, coincidence of sentiment, and congeniality of spirit, are all blended with the love of God, the enjoyment of his friendship, and the hope of his eternal glory! This is happiness which deserves the name, the best and the purest which it is permitted to mortals to enjoy in the present imperfect world; a world, however, which is designed to be preparatory to a state of boundless and eternal bliss.

I have now specified those sources of happiness which appear to be of principal importance; but it is necessary to bear in mind, that earthly happiness arises from a succession of pleasurable feelings, the aggregate of which may constitute a great amount of enjoyment, while the specific and immediate occasions of such feelings may appear frequently very slight, if not even trivial. I think it important, therefore, to specify as

A FOURTH source of happiness, the cultiva-

tion of those habits which are most conducive to enjoyment.

The considerations I have now to suggest may, with propriety and advantage, assume the form of practical advice, rather than of speculative discussion.

1. Let me recommend the habitual cultivation of a spirit of thankfulness.

If it be "of the Lord's mercies you are not consumed," Lam. iii. 22, how grateful should you be for favours, every one of which is undeserved! Are you in the enjoyment of health? You might have been at this moment, as multitudes at this moment are, tortured with pain or debilitated by lingering disease. Be not unmindful of the value of an exemption from such suffering. Remember how much the tone of feeling and of temper is usually dependent on the state of the health. Forget not how much the views we form of our situation and circumstances receive a colouring and a character from the state of the health. Think how much our capacity for usefulness is dependent on health and vigour. Cherish then the liveliest gratitude for a blessing of such incalculable value, and ever guard it from unnecessary and unwarrantable exposure, even with religious care.

In addition to the pleasurable feelings which arise from bodily health, are you in possession also of intellectual enjoyments? Render a tribute of lively gratitude to the Father of spirits, to whose sustaining goodness you are indebted for the preservation of your mental

vigour, no less than for the original endowments of your intellectual constitution. Are you favoured with social comforts, which you well know how to appreciate; and are the delights of domestic endearment among the richest ingredients in your cup of earthly joy? Let then your praises constantly ascend to the Giver of all good, who implanted in our hearts the social principle, and, even in this world of sin and sorrow, has rendered it productive of such exquisite delight. Are you the recipients not only of all these pleasures, but also of the crowning joys of human life, the joys of salvation, the earnest of joys unutterable and eternal? Surely should you be silent; amid so many excitements to thanksgiving, "the very stones would cry out against you." And be assured, that you cannot more directly consult your own happiness, than by cherishing a disposition of lively gratitude towards your Divine Benefactor, and abounding in the utterances of a thankful and adoring heart. "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord—to show forth his loving-kindness in the morning, and his faithfulness every night.—Praise is comely, and praise is pleasant." Psa. xcii. 1, 2; cxlvii. 1.

2. Cultivate a spirit of cheerfulness.

In the things of the present world, there is usually a mixture of good and of evil. Of the things favourable to our enjoyment, few are so good as not to have an alloy of evil; of the things unfriendly to our comfort, few are so evil as not to have some admixture of good.



Now suppose one person, from the prevailing temper of his mind, to be habitually engaged in extracting evil from that which is, upon the whole, good, and another person to be habitually employed in extracting good from that in which evil is the prevailing character, it is not difficult to discern on whose side lies the advantage in point of happiness. The one looks habitually on the dark side, the other on the bright side of every object. The one diffuses the gloomy character of his own mind over the whole sphere of his pursuits and of his possessions; the other diffuses the sunshine of his own soul over the entire circle by which he is surrounded. To cultivate the habit of cheerfulness, then, is one of the most rational and the most successful methods of consulting our happiness, and one which is obviously dictated by the spirit and the principles we imbibe at the pure fountain of Divine truth. Serene joy, tranquil gladness, and unclouded cheerfulness are among the habits of mind, which the religion of the New Testament is most powerfully adapted to produce.

### 3. Cultivate a spirit of contentment.

How much of meaning, and alas! of truth, there is in the assertion of the poet, "Man never *is*, but always *to be*, blest." He is apt to overlook the sources of enjoyment which are in his possession, and to aim at such as may not even be within his reach; forgetting the important sentiment expressed by the Saviour, when he assured his hearers, that the happiness of life consists not in the abundance

of the things possessed. Luke xii. 15. Many there are, and many there have always been, in full possession of wealth, and honour, and power; and yet from a variety of causes, they are the very reverse of happy; while not a few, in the absence of all these objects of human ambition, have displayed entire contentment, and declared themselves satisfied and happy. "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content." 1 Tim. vi. 6—8.

#### 4. Cultivate a spirit of dependence.

Say with the psalmist, and with the psalmist's feelings, when approaching to God, "All my springs are in thee;"—from thee alone is my expectation. Thou art my hope and my confidence. Psa. lxxxvii. 7; lxii. 5; lxxi. 5. Be it ever the deep conviction of your heart, that happiness depends not on your own unaided power, but on perpetual communications from the resources of Him who is the foundation of blessedness. Regard it as a truth of most comprehensive import, and of absolutely universal extension, that "a man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven." John iii. 27. What hast thou, which thou hast not received from Him who gave thee every capacity of enjoyment; and what hast thou which he may not recall and resume at his pleasure? By a law not of *thy* being only, but of *all* created beings, thou art necessarily dependent for life and for happiness on Him

who alone is uncreated, independent, self-existent. Pay then to Him the perpetual homage of a dependent spirit, of a mind delighting to feel itself indebted every moment to his care and to his goodness. If reconciled to Him, and interested in his paternal love, art thou not authorized to yield thyself to the repose of unbounded confidence, and to dismiss from thy mind all corroding care and distressing solicitude? "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Phil. iv. 6, 7.

5. Cultivate a spirit of activity.

Indolence and torpor are utterly incompatible with true enjoyment. As habitual exercise is essential to the health of the body, so is habitual activity essential to the happiness of the mind. "Engagement," says a distinguished writer on this subject, "is every thing. Any engagement which is innocent is better than none." Vacuity of mind, and absence of occupation, render a man wretched. Many who, imagining happiness to consist in ease and leisure, have retired from the active engagements of life to perfect quiet and repose, have found themselves miserably disappointed. But shall a rational and immortal being take refuge *in mere occupation*; in order simply to pass away his time, without the sense of wearying listlessness? Shall he ima-

gine *that* expenditure of time to be innocent which is devoted to mere amusement; when no plea for the necessity of amusement can be founded on the fatigue of previous exertion? With energies of mind and of body, bestowed and sustained for purposes of high importance, is it deemed innocent by Him to whom our account must be rendered, to devote to mere amusement not hours only, nor days, but even months and years? And if such a course were not in itself deserving of reprehension, could it possibly be conducive to true enjoyment? Hazard not the experiment on yourselves. Suffice it to see the result in the wretchedness of the idlers of every class, who are spending their money for that which is not pleasure, and their time for that which satisfieth not.

6. Cultivate a spirit of benevolence.

If a man can find no enjoyment except when directly engaged in seeking his own happiness, his pleasures must be necessarily limited, as well as selfish. But if, with the love of God and the love of man reigning in his heart, he take delight in rendering others happy, his sources of pleasure must be abundant and perpetual. To cultivate a spirit of benevolence is at once, then, our interest and our duty. "Look not every man on his own things," said the benevolent apostle, "but every man also on the things of others.—Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." Phil. ii. 4; Acts xx. 35. Remember

the exigencies of the poor, of the friendless, of the afflicted, and of the ignorant; and connect with their miseries, their claims; their claims on your commiseration, your time, and your property. Think how many of your fellow-creatures, with natural susceptibilities of delight not inferior to your own, are altogether strangers to true happiness, and destitute of the moral and divinely prescribed means of discovering the way to its attainment! Are not myriads perishing for lack of knowledge? Are you not in possession of the treasures of Divine truth, by which they may become "wise unto salvation," and happy through an unchanging eternity? Remember, that "he who winneth souls" to the paths of peace and glory, is, by the highest authority, pronounced "wise," Prov. ii. 30; he is wise in seeking for himself and for others the happiness of immortality; for they who are thus wise shall hereafter "shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever." Dan. xii. 3.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE PLEASURES OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

IN the pursuit of happiness, no pleasures are more to be valued than those which are now to engage our attention; the pleasures of a good conscience. In themselves they are a source of exquisite and refined delight; and in their influence, they are most powerfully conducive to the enjoyment of every other legitimate pleasure. A good conscience is to the mind what health is to the body. Health is itself a spring of indescribably pleasurable feelings, while it predisposes and qualifies for every other species of enjoyment. A good conscience, also, is a never-failing source of the purest and the noblest delights, while it renders the mind and heart susceptible of ever growing happiness.

We enter not, in this chapter, on any metaphysical analysis of that part of our mental constitution, to which we give the name of conscience. It is not important to our present purpose, to ascertain whether it be a simple, original faculty of the mind, or whether it involve a complexity of operations, which may be resolved, by a careful and scrutinizing analysis, into more simple elements. Suffice it to say, that to conscience belong the most important decisions of the intellect, and the most powerful emotions of the heart. It is

that part of our mental constitution, by which we arraign and examine, with a view to an impartial judgment, our own actions and our own motives, and by which we become susceptible of pain or of pleasure, corresponding with the nature of the decision pronounced.

The pleasures of a good conscience may be comprised under four heads:—

To the FIRST of these belongs *the relief enjoyed.*

To a person who has never felt pain of body, it would be difficult to conceive of the pleasures arising from instantaneous ease, and entire relief from agony. To a being who had never been conscious of sin, it might be difficult to conceive of the pleasure imparted by relief from the burden of guilt and of fear. In both cases, the cessation of anguish is felt to be equivalent to positive and even high delight. What cannot conscience inflict? In the pungent words of an old writer, it may be said, "Conscience is God's greatest officer and vicegerent in man; set by him to be as it were thy angel, keeper, monitor, remembrancer, witness, examiner, judge, yea, thy lower heaven. If thou slight this officer, it will be an adversary, informer, accuser, jailor, tormentor to thee, yea, thy upper hell." Now this representation, strong as is the language, is fully justified by facts. What a history of its inflictions might be unfolded, if in thousands of instances there should be brought before us a disclosure of its secret stings, its fearful struggles, and its terrific forebodings!

“What awful discoveries would appal us, if sweeping aside the pomp and deception of life, we could draw from the last hours of some, all the illuminations, the convictions, and the uncontrollable emotions of their hearts!” What would be our feelings, if we could learn their reluctant but irresistible persuasion of many things on which they laboured to maintain a perfect scepticism, and their torturing dread of that wrath to come, of the terrors and the dangers of which they before felt no impression! But even without the development of these awful secrets, may not a correct estimate be formed by overt acts? Why has many a Romish devotee, after a life of guilt, incarcerated himself in his cell, lacerating his body, and almost denying himself the sustenance of food, and the refreshment of sleep, but with a view to silence the reproaches of an ever-accusing conscience? Why does the deluded Hindoo devote his life to privation and to pain, but that, under the consciousness of guilt, and the dread of futurity, he endeavours, by the sufferings of his body, to expiate the sin of his soul? “Here is a man,” says Mr. Ward, of Serampore, “entering on a pilgrimage full of perils and hardships. He expects to travel a thousand miles on foot, begging his way. Ask him why he encounters all these terrors, and he will tell you, that his salvation requires it. Under that tree sits a man; repeating the name of his guardian deity; counting the repetitions by his bead-roll, and intending to continue the



employment till his death. I once saw at Calcutta two Hindoos, each of whom had surrounded himself with three large fires, so near as almost to scorch him, while the vertical sun beat upon his bare head. Every day was passed in the practice of these austerities; and it was said, that these men remained up to the neck in the Ganges during a considerable part of the night. I have sometimes asked an inquiring Hindoo, Why do you wish to become a Christian? 'Ah, sir,' replied the poor man, 'I have tried all the ways which my countrymen follow, yet I find no inward satisfaction, no relief. But I have lately heard, that Jesus Christ became incarnate, and that he died for sinners. This, I think, must surely be the true way of salvation, and it is from this conviction that I wish to become a Christian.'"

And can *you* entertain any doubt whether this be the true way of peace, the only way of salvation? Why does conscience accuse, but because God condemns? How then can conscience acquit, unless God absolve, and pardon, and justify? This he can do—this he is ever willing to do; and it is the glory and the excellency of the gospel, that it discloses the wondrous plan, and reveals the grand expedient by which this can be effected. It demonstrates that God can be just, while the justifier of him who believeth on the Saviour. "We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through

faith in his blood," Rom. iii. 24, 25. We have peace with God by the blood of his cross. The tranquillizing effect produced upon the conscience, by a view of the atoning sacrifice and mediatorial engagement of the Son of God, is thus beautifully exhibited by the inspired writer of the epistle to the Hebrews; "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience," Heb. x. 19—22.

Among the pleasures of a good conscience may be included,

**SECONDLY, *The communications received.***

We should form a very inadequate view of the pleasures of a good conscience, were we to contemplate them only under a negative aspect, and to regard them as consisting merely in relief from apprehensions of evil. The peace introduced into the mind by the gospel of salvation is of a far higher character, comprising a great degree of positive enjoyment. Of its nature and its value some idea may be formed, if you consider the agency by which it is produced and maintained. Deriving its distinguishing character from its Divine Author, it is emphatically termed, "the peace of God," and is justly represented as passing "all understanding," Phil.

iv. 7. "Peace I leave with you," said Jesus to his disciples, "my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you," John xiv. 27. The kingdom of God, the interior dominion of the Father of spirits in the soul of man, is not only "righteousness," but also "peace and joy in the Holy Ghost," Rom. xiv. 17. What, think you, must be the value and the efficacy of that peace, in producing happiness, which is thus ascribed, in one passage, to the Father of mercies; in another, to the Divine Redeemer; and in a third, to the Spirit of grace? What think you of the happiness secured to the man, through whose mind and heart that peace is copiously diffused? What think you of a communication expressly intended and divinely adapted, to meet all the varying circumstances of the Christian in this present evil world? What does he need? What does he desire? What, with a well-regulated mind, would he implore and expect? Not, surely, a perpetually extatic joy, a constant and overflowing fulness of delight. Bliss so rapturous belongs only to the state of celestial glory, which he has indeed the happiness of keeping steadfastly in view, but which he expects not to realize, while he continues to be an inhabitant of the present world. But that which he needs and desires, is a mind tranquil amid the agitating turmoil, and serene amid the perturbing troubles of these ever changing scenes. Such is the peace which the Saviour encouraged his disciples to expect! and such is the peace which we may

suppose to have ever reigned in his own unruffled breast, notwithstanding all the sufferings, and all the fatigues, and all the temptations to which he was exposed.

Is there, or has there ever been, within your minds, a peace of this pure and powerful nature, which must be known in order to be understood—which may be attained, but cannot be adequately described? Have you received, by looking unto Jesus, and experienced, in answer to the prayer of faith, the tranquillizing influences of his Holy Spirit? If so, you are no strangers to real and substantial happiness. Yet you have hitherto merely tasted of a joy, which, from its nature and its source, is capable of indefinite and perpetual augmentation. The Divine Giver has not affixed limits to the extent to which he is ever willing to grant this inestimable benefit. Pray then more earnestly, that it may be diffused throughout all the capacities of your soul, and that by its gently pervading and commanding influence, it may keep your heart and mind, through Christ Jesus!

Among the pleasures of a good conscience may be included,

THIRDLY, *The habits induced.*

He who has *entered* on the enjoyment of a good conscience will be solicitous to *maintain* a good conscience. Of this solicitude, and of the habits it induces, a noble exemplification is given us in the instance of the apostle Paul. In his defence before Felix, he thus describes the workings of his mind;

“Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men,” Acts xxiv. 16. It is as if he had said, “It is my anxious concern, my habitual effort, so to conduct myself towards God and towards man, that my conscience may not condemn.” Now in order that conscience may be preserved in a state favourable to those operations, from which alone can flow its legitimate pleasures, it is necessary that there be in perpetual exercise,

1. A habit of careful discrimination and decision.

The discriminations and decisions of conscience must be *correct*.

Plausible and eloquent representations have been made of the *moral sense*, which has been said to reside in every human breast, and to be an infallible criterion of right and wrong, acting with all the power and all the certainty of an instinctive impulse. Fair as seems this theory on the first inspection, it is vitiated and falsified by a thousand facts. While instinct is precisely the same in all the individuals of the same species, and among the inferior animals may be trusted as a safe and sufficient guide, the moral sense of mankind has led individuals, of different characters and different countries, to diametrically opposite decisions, and has been found continually to vary with nations, and customs, and laws. There was nothing in the moral sense of Saul of Tarsus, which condemned him for looking with complacency on the martyrdom of Ste-

phen. There is nothing in the moral sense of the American Indian, which condemns him for taking the scalps of his enemies. There is nothing in the moral sense of the population of Ashantee, in Western Africa, to condemn them for sacrificing, at the funeral of a chief, a thousand human beings! There is nothing in the moral sense of many a man who calls himself a Christian, to accuse him for devoting a part or the whole of the Sabbath, to the prosecution of his journeys, or the settlement of his accounts, or the pursuit of his pleasures, or the perusal of Sunday newspapers. There is nothing in the moral sense of others, which accuses them of sin in the indulgence of a spirit of calumny, and slander, and detraction. Of necessity, then, we must seek a higher and a more certain standard of right and wrong. But a life may be spent in the search, and spent in vain, unless we seek it in the word of infallible truth, which reveals the holy will and the holy character of God. *There* we shall find a criterion absolutely perfect, and universally applicable. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb. Moreover

by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward," Psa. xix. 7—11.

The decisions of conscience must be *prompt* as well as correct.

Although conscience greatly differs from instinct which is blind and undiscerning, yet, with all the promptitude of instinctive impulse, conscience is required to perform its functions. Numerous and frequent are the instances, in which determinations and resolutions must be formed and carried into effect, without a moment's hesitation or delay. It is of high importance, then, that sound and unimpeachable principles of conduct be adopted, remembered and applied. There should be treasured up in the mind, a correct and consistent system of general laws and maxims, so well understood in all their bearings, and so deeply felt in all their obligation; that whether in public or in private, whether in the church or in the world, they may instantaneously occur to the memory, and prescribe an appropriate course of conduct. If there be not a readiness thus promptly to decide, the opportunity for action may be irretrievably lost; or advantage may be given to the force of a sudden temptation, so that sin may be committed, and the conscience may be burdened with guilt. To exempt us from so great a danger, the God of truth has been graciously pleased to favour us with the most explicit guidance in his holy word, which "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for in-

struction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. Discerning with grateful admiration the fitness of the Scriptures to answer this important end, the psalmist exclaimed, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee," Psa. cxix. 11.

The decisions of conscience must also be *authoritative*.

In vain will conscience speak, either in the language of advice or of remonstrance, if that voice be not regarded. If its dictates be opposed, they will usually become more feeble and less frequent, till the voice be stifled and the remonstrances suppressed. It is the restoration of conscience to its dignity and its authority, which is one of the first effects of regenerating grace, and one of the strongest evidences of the principles of holiness. To the mind which is renewed, the voice of conscience is as the voice of God. The Christian dares not, and is not disposed to refuse obedience to its dictates. He becomes *conscientious*; or, in other words, he is now habitually under the dominion of conscience, and distinguished by a susceptibility of feeling, which yields spontaneously to the injunctions of this inward monitor.

He would greatly misconceive of the nature of conscience, who should regard it as consisting either exclusively of judgment, or exclusively of feeling. It is neither of these separately; it combines both. The former



takes the lead; the latter fails not to follow. In obedience to its enlightened dictates, and under the influence of its most delicate sensibilities, the conscientious Christian dreads even the appearance of sin, shrinks from the approach of evil, and flees from the face of temptation.

2. There must be the habit of frequent and faithful retrospect.

The exercise in which the apostle declared himself to be employed, with a view to maintain a conscience void of offence, must have consisted greatly in the habit of instituting a strict and determined scrutiny into the state of his mind and heart, with a view to compare his dispositions and feelings with the requirements of his God and Saviour. Now this must be a process more or less familiar to the mind of every Christian. He practically acknowledges the authority of conscience, by obeying the summons to its tribunal, and submitting to every scrutiny it requires. To himself the Christian is not, as once he was, a stranger. He cultivates assiduously the habit of self-acquaintance, and deems the knowledge of himself scarcely inferior in importance to the knowledge of his God. Some retrospect of his heart and of his deportment he finds it desirable to take at the close of every day; and there are periods and occasions, on which he deems it important to devote to the work of self-examination an ampler portion of his time, and the full energy of his mind. With equal sincerity and fervour is he often im-

pelled to offer the psalmist's prayer; "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Psa. cxxxix. 23, 24.

3. There must be the habit of immediately seeking relief when under the consciousness of sin.

When once the pleasures of a good conscience have been enjoyed, the pain of an evil conscience becomes intolerable. If at any time, under the force of temptation operating upon principles of evil not entirely eradicated, there be the commission of sin; the sensibilities of a tender conscience may be expected soon to awaken the offender to a conviction of his delinquency, and to impel the tears of godly sorrow, the sighs of a broken heart, and the emotions of genuine repentance. These feelings of distress will require, without delay, a renewed and most humble application to that precious blood, which "cleanseth from all sin," 1 John i. 7. An enlightened conscience feels the force of both parts of the representation of the apostle John, when he says, "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins." 1 John ii. 1, 2. The emotions of conscience, when under the sense of newly contracted guilt, and when ardently seeking the restoration of lost delights, are such as the psalmist expressed in these affecting strains; "Behold,

thou desirest truth in the inward parts. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit." Psa. li. 6—12.

The pleasures of a good conscience arise,  
FOURTHLY, *From the testimony obtained.*

"Our rejoicing is this," exclaims the apostle; "the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world." 2 Cor. i. 12. This testimony was the happy result of those exercises of the inner man, in which we have seen that the apostle was habitually engaged. Now on the very first consideration of the subject, this testimony must be regarded as inexpressibly valuable and desirable. Such a testimony cannot fail to be the source of the purest and most exalted pleasures, under all the vicissitudes of human life. But of this we may be still more deeply convinced, by taking a few distinct views of its influence, especially under the most interesting circumstances, and at the most eventful periods of human existence.

1. This testimony will inspire the most delightful confidence in approaching to God.

A consciousness of sin unpardoned, or of sin indulged, must necessarily produce alarm and self-reproach, and render the act of drawing near to God an occasion of disquieting apprehensions. "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." 1 John iii. 20—23. We know that we cannot draw near to God, acceptably, unless in the exercise of faith in Christ; but if we have the testimony of our conscience, that we are exercising that faith, we approach with confidence. We know that we are not the disciples of the Saviour, if destitute of brotherly love; but if we have the testimony of our conscience, that we are cherishing that love, we approach with confidence. We know that we are not the servants of Christ unless we keep his commands: but if we have the testimony of our conscience, that there is not one precept which we do not cordially love, and anxiously desire to obey, we approach with confidence. Although painfully conscious of our defects and imperfections, yet

placing our hope in the merit of the Redeemer, and yielding ourselves to the influences of heavenly grace, "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but we have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Rom. viii. 14—16.

2. This testimony will induce a noble superiority both to the applause and to the censure of the undiscerning world.

There is a deference to the sentiments of others, which is amiable and desirable; but there is an anxiety respecting their opinions, a desire of applause, and a fear of disapprobation, most ensnaring. It is the condemnation of many that they love "the praise of men more than the praise of God." John xii. 43. The very reverse of this characterized the apostle Paul; "With me," said he, "it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: but he that judgeth me is the Lord." 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4. With the great tribunal in view, with the word by which we are to be judged at the last day open before us, and with the decisions of an enlightened conscience to direct our conduct, surely we ought to rise above the dread of human censure, and the undue desire of securing the approbation of the world. Were the applaudings of our fellow-creatures repeated every hour, they could not compensate for

the absence of one approving testimony of our conscience; and if that testimony be habitually received, it may well be "our rejoicing," even amid the contempt and the calumny of a mistaken world.

3. This testimony will give an increased capacity for enjoying all the lawful pleasures of life.

"He that is of a merry heart," said the wise man—a heart rendered cheerful by the testimony of a good conscience; "hath a continual feast." Prov. xv. 15. His familiar trains of thought are peaceful and pleasurable. His memory presents before him no disturbing recollections, his imagination no images of terror. There is diffused through his spirit a tranquillity, which is the first requisite to true enjoyment, and which gives a zest even to the ordinary pleasures of life. "Go thy way," said the inspired writer of the book of Ecclesiastes, "eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works." Eccl. ix. 7.

4. This testimony can administer the most desirable support in the time of trouble, and in the prospect of death.

Its efficacy is attested by the apostle in the words connected with the text. "We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure; above strength, inasmuch that we despaired even of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God

which raiseth the dead. For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience." 2 Cor. i. 8, 9, 12. Was there ever, in his eventful history, a situation of peril or of suffering, in which he was not sustained and cheered by the voice of an approving and rejoicing conscience? Under its bliss-inspiring influence, the dungeon of Philippi, at the midnight hour, was even as the gate of heaven: and at Rome, in the prospect of a speedy martyrdom, he could say with undisturbed serenity, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing," 2 Tim. iv. 6—8. These concluding words intimate, that the joyous anticipations, thus expressed, were not peculiar to the apostle, but were such as all who love the Saviour are authorized to cherish. They have been adopted, with serene composure, or with seraphic joy, by thousands and by tens of thousands of departing Christians, whose dying experience attested, that to them death had lost its terrors and its sting. Directing the eye of faith to Jesus on the cross, making atonement for their sin; to Jesus before the throne, interceding for his people; and to Jesus in his glory, exercising uncontrolled authority over the invisible world and over death—they have seen no cause of tre-

pidation in a departure from the present life; but have exulted in the prospect of being the inhabitants of another and a happier province of their Redeemer's empire, rendered attractive by his presence, and irradiated by the beams of his glory: May our end, like theirs, be peace and joy: and cannot the gospel and the grace of Christ accomplish that for us, which it has already effected for them? Not more secure from change are the promises of the Saviour, recorded in his word, than the dispositions which reign in his heart. Let us then, with an entire reliance, entrust to his love and to his care the interests both of our mortal bodies and of our never-dying spirits. With a conscience sprinkled by his atoning blood, and purified by his word and Spirit, may each of us be enabled through life and in death to exclaim, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day!" 2 Tim. i. 12.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE PLEASURES OF AN ENLIGHTENED INTELLECT.

SUCH was the criminal disregard of the word of God, during one dark period in the history of Judah and Jerusalem, that not a single



copy of the law was to be found, either in the temple of the Lord, or in the palace of the king. At length, when the sanctuary was undergoing some extensive repairs, Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord," 2 Kings xxii. 8; and Shaphan read its contents in the presence of Josiah, the pious prince. Had the sacred treasure been thus discovered in the days of Amon his father, or Manasseh his impious grandfather, it would probably have been withheld, if not destroyed. And many a later period has there been in the history of the world, and of the Church, in which, had such a destitution of the word of God prevailed, and such a discovery occurred, a miracle only could have rescued from destruction the precious volume. Princes there have been who would have suppressed it; priests who would have corrupted or concealed it; and infidels who, with blasphemous exultation, would have committed it to the flames. But, by the great goodness of its Divine Author and Preserver, it has been transmitted, in all its purity and entireness, even to our own day. Blessed are our eyes, for we read in our own language the oracles of truth, which are able to make us wise unto salvation! Happy indeed are we, if the state of our feelings and the habits of our minds be in full accordance with the sentiment expressed by Jeremiah, when he said, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of

my heart," Jer. xv. 16. It is not to a discovery precisely such as was made in the days of Josiah, that these words appear to refer, but rather to a perception of the fulness of evidence and of excellence, by which the word of God is distinguished; an impression of its unequalled value, and a reception of its joyous and consolatory truths. The word of God is justly compared to food; to food which is both agreeable to the palate, and nutritious to the frame. It is to this adaptation of the word of God to impart delight, that our attention is now to be directed. May we, by the gracious aid of the Spirit of truth, enter into the admiring views and rapturous feelings of the psalmist, when he exclaimed, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!—More to be desired are they than gold, sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb," Psa. cxix. 103; xix. 10.

There are two inquiries to which I would now invite your thoughts:

FIRST. In what points of view may we regard the truths of the Divine word as sources of delight?

These truths are calculated to impart pleasure to the mind.

1. As they afford most interesting occupation to the intellect.

It is essential to the preservation of life and health that we should frequently partake of food: it is an evidence, therefore, of the goodness of the Creator, that he has made us sus-

ceptible of the feelings of hunger, and of the pleasurable sensations of taste. By the former we are impelled to provide that food which we might otherwise fatally neglect; and by the latter we are in some degree reconciled to the expenditure of time, and thought, and labour, which to the great majority of mankind are requisite to its procurement. It is not less essential to the well-being of a rational *mind* to be employed, with vigour and frequency, on subjects adapted to its nature, and worthy of its energies; it is an evidence, therefore, of the goodness of the Creator, that he has connected a high degree of pleasure with the vigorous exercises of the understanding. The human mind cannot be happy in a state of torpor and inaction; it can only be conscious of enjoyment, when it is excited to energetic efforts. Whatever rouses its activities, within the sphere of its legitimate and appropriate pursuits, is conducive to its enjoyment. It is this mental excitement which constitutes a principal part of the pleasure we derive from the studious researches of our retired hours. It is this which constitutes, in no small degree, the charm of social intercourse, when, as iron sharpeneth iron, so does the countenance of a man his friend. Prov. xxvii. 17. The suggestions of one mind excite the suggestions of another mind, and the production of the affluence of one intellect calls forth to view the corresponding wealth of another. It is this which renders the perusal of valuable books a source

of so much delight. It is not only what we read, but what the reading excites, which constitutes the richest part of our intellectual gratification.

Now, what production is there, in the whole compass of written language, in any country or of any age, which can be compared with the word of God in its power of affording interesting occupation to the intellect? Reflect on *the character of its contents*. It is adapted, not to readers of some particular class, as the works of uninspired authors usually are, but to men of every class, of every gradation of intellect, and of every state of society. It is not calculated for the few, but for the many, for the mass of human beings, in all the varieties of character and of condition in which human nature can be developed. The Bible gives a history of the human race, from its very origin, and of the human mind, both in its pristine purity and in its present corruption. The Bible gives a history of Divine Providence, in its most remarkable interpositions; and the history of human redemption, in all its mysterious doctrines, in all its glorious operations, and in all its triumphant results. The Bible presents to the mind of man discoveries, which have attracted the admiration and guided the researches of angels; so that "now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places is made known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." Eph. iii. 10. The Bible removes, in part, the veil which conceals a far

distant futurity, and extends its revelations beyond the limits of time, as well as of sense, into a world of boundless and eternal felicity!

Consider also *the effects which the word of God has actually produced upon the human intellect.*

There is no state of the human understanding, however depressed and grovelling, which, when accompanied by the power of the inspiring Spirit, it has not immeasurably elevated. It has taught men to think, who never thought before. It has awakened mental activity, even where all seemed dormant. It has rendered wise, in the knowledge of highest value, even the Hottentot, and the Bushman, and the Negro, and the Tahitian. In our own enlightened country, it interests and invigorates the mind of the labourer and the mechanic, as well as of the scholar and the man of science; and in instances without number, "the entrance of the Divine word has given light—has given understanding to the simple!" Psa. cxix. 130. Do you resort, for refined delight, to the productions of men distinguished by intellectual energy and extensive knowledge? Then, on the very same principle, in connexion with principles of a still higher character, let me urge you to have daily recourse to the fountain of Divine truth. Yield your minds, with all their vigour and all their susceptibility, to the study of the word of God; and you cannot fail to be richly repaid, by the highest species of intellectual delight. You will find in it the true sublime

—the moral, the spiritual sublime! You will discover, by its revelations, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; and comparing it with the boldest claims and the noblest productions of literature and science, may you learn to “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.” Phil. iii. 8.

The truths of the Divine word are conducive to our delight,

2. As they are adapted to exert a tranquilizing and pleasurable influence on the feelings of the heart.

Intellectual pleasures can only be enjoyed when the heart and conscience are at ease. If there be disquietude of mind, and especially if there be alarm of conscience, no capability can there be of enjoying the pleasures of thought; no security can there be against the intrusion of reflections which disturb, and of feelings which distract. A single recollection, brought to the mind by a casual occurrence, or a fear suggested by a single word, or by the sight of an object scarcely noticed by others, may produce a gloom, which no external or internal source of pleasure can have power to dispel. Under these depressing conceptions, the first and the grand requisite is, to obtain tranquillity of conscience. And who is able to remove far away its burden of guilt, and to introduce the peace which passeth all understanding? It is He, and He alone, “who himself bare our sins in his own body on the tree,” who redeems us from the curse of the

violated law, by "being made a curse for us," and who, "having made peace through the blood of his cross," says to his believing followers, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." 1 Pet. ii. 24; Gal. iii. 13; Col. i. 20; John xiv. 27. Without this peace, we have no preparation of mind for the enjoyment of those intellectual pleasures which arise from the study of the word of God. In the entire absence of this peace, and of Scriptural efforts to obtain it, the man who feels the consciousness of guilt might say, "Why do you direct me to read, as a source of pleasure, that book which reveals the terrors of the Almighty? It is the thought of God which fills my mind with dread. Why do you direct me to read for delight, a volume which sets before me the representations of a future judgment? The thought of that tribunal overpowers my soul with dismay. Why do you direct me to read the descriptions contained in the Bible of the happiness of heaven! I have no hope of its felicity." But, on the contrary, suppose the conscience to be at peace, by "the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus," 1 Pet. i. 2; and suppose a good hope through grace to have banished every torturing fear, *then* will the word of God be found a source of the purest and most abundant delight. Now it is the direct and designed tendency of the Scriptures to prepare the mind for the joys of a sanctified intellect, by removing from the conscience the tremendous burden of guilt. The word of God testifies,

throughout its extended pages, of Him whose name is called Jesus, because he saves his people from their sins. Matt. i. 21.

The truths of revelation are sources of delight,

3. As they are congenial to the taste of the renewed mind, under all possible varieties of feeling and of condition.

You have access, I will suppose, to a well-selected library. Many of the works which it contains, belong to the class which is congenial to your prevailing taste, while others which you there find excite in your mind no desire of perusal. Now of those to which you feel attracted, you frequently make a choice, which is influenced by the tone and feeling of your mind, at the moment of making the selection. The book, which at one time you read with great delight, would probably at another time excite scarcely any feeling of interest, or might perhaps be altogether dissonant from the emotions of your heart. The very sight of a volume seems sometimes to rouse a train of thought, which does violence to the feelings you are disposed to cherish; and these feelings may be dependent on a variety of causes which it might not be always easy to trace, but which have more or less connexion with the passing events of almost every day. But when is there a day, or when are there occurrences, or when are there feelings, in which it would seem uncongenial to the mind of a Christian to take up his *Bible*, and to meditate upon some of its



interesting contents? All that he can at any time find necessary is, to consult his feelings and circumstances, by a selection of such parts of the Bible; as may correspond with the prevailing frame of his own mind.

Are you at any time disposed to apply the full vigour of your understanding to an investigation of the grand doctrines of redemption? Imploring the guidance of that Spirit who leadeth into all truth, study such parts of the volume of inspiration as the epistles of Paul to the Romans, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Hebrews. Are you at any time peculiarly disposed to yield your hearts to tender and deep impressions of the Saviour's love? Read his farewell discourse to his disciples, his intercessory prayer to his Father, and the affecting recital, given by the Evangelists, of his mental anguish, and his sufferings on the cross. Are you desirous of practical directions, for guidance in the path of duty and obedience, in all the relations and transactions of life? Collect and study the precepts interspersed throughout the sacred volume, "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," 2 Tim. iii. 17. Do you need the assistance of the word as well as of the Spirit of God, in order to sustain and direct the devotional efforts of the soul at the throne of heavenly grace? Avail yourselves of those admirable models of prayer and thanksgiving which abound throughout the Old Testament and the New, and especially of the effusions of

David's heart, when there descended upon his spirit the richest unction from above. Are you at any period of life depressed by trouble, or enfeebled by affliction? Let your recourse be to the exceeding great and precious promises, which are applicable to every species of distress, and which have poured the balm of consolation into many a wounded heart. In health, there is a pleasure to be enjoyed in the study of the word of God, which far surpasses the gratification to be derived from any human author; but who, except instructed by actual experience, can conceive aright of the value of the Scriptures in the chamber of sickness and of languishing? In health, the Bible is the *best* book, but in illness it is perhaps the *only* book which the Christian can read. Every other becomes insipid and uninteresting; or, perhaps, the effort to read or to think costs too much to be repaid by any book, except by that which is Divine. Oh, this is the book which he then needs, which he is then taught more than ever to prize. Precious, beyond expression, are the consolations it imparts, and the hopes it inspires; so that many, under all the languor induced by the most debilitating and depressing maladies, have been able to exclaim, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jer. xv. 16.. It was in perfect unison with the sentiments now expressed, that a Christian of distinguished eminence in professional life and in scientific attainments, who now

sleeps in Jesus, when he found himself approaching another scene of existence, said, in reference to the word of God, "I have now done with every other book;" and when just about to depart, he said to an attendant, "Bring me the Bible, and let me lay my hand once more on that blessed book." The Bible was accordingly brought, and being assisted to place his hand upon it, he laid himself down, saying, "I rest in Christ," and expired! Who can hear of such a departure, without that silent aspiration of the soul, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Numb. xxiii. 10.

We are now, I trust, prepared to inquire,

SECONDLY, What are the principal requisites to the enjoyment of these sacred pleasures? I would specify,

1. The renovation of the mind, by the power of the Spirit of God.

In vain would you provide for any one a source of delight for which he has no taste. It may give great pleasure to you, but to him it cannot impart the slightest, unless you can effect a change in the inclinations of his mind. Now it is a fact, not less certain than awful, that such is the depraved taste of the human mind while unregenerate; that it has no susceptibility of the pleasures arising from the knowledge of Divine truth: It is not even disposed or prepared for the attainment of that knowledge. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: neither can he know them, because they are spiritu-

ally discerned." 1 Cor. ii. 14. To him may be applied, in their full extent of meaning, those words of the Lord Jesus, "Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Matt. xvi. 23. A spiritual discernment, and a spiritual taste, are inseparably connected. He who has no taste for these pleasures, will not be disposed to direct his full power of thought to the class of truths divinely adapted to convey spiritual delight. Subjects such as these take no hold of his heart. He never thinks of resorting to them as sources of pleasure, nor do they ever engage his attention, except under some occasional and unwelcome sense of duty, or under the influence of early education, which will sometimes awaken disquietude of conscience, for neglecting the concerns of the world to come. Under these circumstances, is there not an absolute necessity for the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit? Is there any power less than Omnipotence, which can create in man a new heart, and breathe into his soul a right spirit? Must he not be indebted to a Divine agency, for the acquisition of a new taste, and of predilections which give a new character to his mind? Must he not be "born again," in order that old things may pass away, and that all things may become new? 2 Cor. v. 17. Let him experience this transformation, and now, having "tasted that the Lord is gracious," with all the eagerness of a "new-born babe," he will desire the unadulterated milk of the word, that he

may grow thereby. 1 Pet. ii. 2. Now he can say, with emotions of desire and of delight unfelt before, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jer. xv. 16.

Among the requisites to the attainment of these pleasures, I would specify,

2. Diligence in the study of the word of God.

Even of those who are not strangers to the first "principles of the doctrine of Christ," there are, I fear, many who can scarcely be said to *study* the Bible, or to "*search* the Scriptures." John v. 39. They, perhaps, daily read some paragraph; selected from those parts of the word of God which are most encouraging and consolatory; but they seldom think of directing to the volume of revealed truth the best energies of their intellect, for any considerable portion of their time. That which they do is certainly of high importance; and if the time which they can command be, notwithstanding their utmost diligence, very limited, I would not uncharitably charge them with neglect. But how many are there who have sufficient time at their command; who have hours as well as moments under their control; who read many books of human production, and yet devote only a very inconsiderable and a very inadequate portion of their leisure to the perusal of the word of God, or of such works as render valuable assistance in the study of the Scriptures? Now would there not, to every renewed mind, be a great

accession of pleasure, from the more diligent and energetic study of Divine truth? Would not the "man of God" receive an ample remuneration from his mental efforts were he to accustom himself to read more considerable portions of the sacred volume, in their order and connexion; and to aim at a more comprehensive and accurate acquaintance with its doctrines, and its histories, and its promises, and its predictions? Would not new lessons of instruction be learned, and new discoveries of Divine wisdom be attained, and new beauties be discerned, to reward his diligence and to stimulate his assiduity? Would he not find, to his satisfaction and gratitude; a constant diminution of difficulties, and a constant increase of delight?

Let me be permitted to press these considerations, with affectionate earnestness, on the minds of the young. What acquisitions of knowledge, my young friends, can be worthy of comparison with the knowledge of the word of God? To be well instructed in its glorious and joyous truths, is to be "wise unto salvation." 2 Tim. iii. 15. Would you not aspire to the character of a disciple of Christ, well informed on the interesting subjects connected with your present privileges, and your eternal peace? Can you expect this without habitual diligence in the study of the word of God? Would it be too much to devote to this delightful study one hour of every day? Is it possible that you could more directly consult your true enjoyment,

than by dedicating to these Divine researches such a proportion of your time and thought?

In addition to the requisites already noticed, let me specify,

3. Earnest prayer for communications of Divine influence, whenever we enter on the study of the word of God.

In the pursuits of knowledge, we greatly value the aid of an enlightened instructor, especially if the subject of investigation be deep and difficult. In the study of Divine truth, we are encouraged to seek a Divine Teacher. "I," saith Jehovah, "am the Lord which teacheth thee to profit." Isa. xlviii. 17. "He will guide you into all truth," said the Lord Jesus Christ, in reference to the promised Spirit. John xvi. 13. Now there is this essential difference between the aid of an earthly and of a heavenly instructor: a human preceptor, however gifted, can only present a subject to our consideration; in that form which he deems best adapted to convey clear and impressive ideas. Gladly would he facilitate the entrance of light into our minds, by giving energy to our intellect, and exerting a direct influence on the mind itself. But this he cannot effect. This is beyond the power of every created being. This is the prerogative of the Father of Spirits. This *He* can, with the utmost ease, accomplish. This *He* effects by the operation of his Holy Spirit. For this the psalmist prayed in these appropriate words, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

**Psa. cxix. 18.** For this the apostle Paul interceded, on behalf of the Ephesians, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, might give unto them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of their understanding being enlightened; that they might know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." Eph. i. 17; 18. We complain, not without reason, of the feebleness of our minds, the obscurity of our views, and the difficulties which impede our progress in the knowledge of Divine truth. Let us not then undervalue or disregard the provisions for our aid. Let us not be remiss in seeking the influence we so much need. Never let us open the volume of truth without imploring the assistance of that Holy Spirit, by whose inspiration it was given to the Church. Let us ask in faith, and with intense earnestness of desire; and it shall be to us according to the word on which He who is ever faithful has encouraged us to rely. It is the Lord Jesus who has said, "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Luke xi. 13.

The subject which has thus occupied our minds, may be regarded,

1. As furnishing a ground of appeal to those who are destitute of these pleasures.

There are those who call themselves Christians, and yet neglect, day after day, the read-



ing of the Holy Scriptures. Are *you* chargeable with this neglect? and if so, are you inclined to assign as a reason, that you feel no interest and find no pleasure in the perusal of the Bible? and will you further allege, in excuse for your omission, that "there can be no disputing about taste?" Let me then most seriously remind you, that there can be no disputing as to the *consequences* of having, or of not having a taste for spiritual pleasures. It is true, a man may have no taste for the fine arts, and the consequence may simply be, an incapacity for a certain species of transient enjoyment. But if a man have no taste for the study of the word of God and the pleasures of Divine knowledge, be it remembered, he has no fitness for the joys of heaven, no qualifications for the pleasures which are at the right hand of God! Should you depart out of life without a taste for these delights, and a fitness for these felicities, exclusion from the abodes of happiness must be your tremendous and eternal destiny! Dread then the thought of remaining under this awful incapacity; this most unreasonable and criminal disinclination to all that is heavenly and Divine. Seek, by faith in the Redeemer, the pardon and the removal of your carnality of mind. Direct your views and your supplications to him who heareth prayer, and who has most graciously said to those who seek him, "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and

I will give you a heart of flesh." Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

From this subject there arises also,  
2. An incentive to gratitude.

Is not the liveliest gratitude due for the invaluable treasures of revealed truth? O what a precious gift, to ignorant, degenerate, dying man, is the word of the living God! It is his light in darkness, his comforter in trouble, his guide in perplexity, his hope in death. Thanks be to God, for causing the Holy Scriptures "to be written for our learning," to be transmitted to our country, to be translated into our language, to be interpreted in our sanctuaries! May they be written on our hearts, may they be recorded in our memory, may they be illustrated by our lives!

Finally, from this subject we may derive a powerful inducement to the dissemination of the Scriptures.

Has this blessed book given peace and pleasure to our own minds? It is equally adapted to give peace and pleasure to the minds of others. It is designed to meliorate the condition and to augment the happiness of our whole race. Without it, man is wretched. And yet, at this very day, it is in the possession only of a small minority of the population of our globe! Can we repress the desire, that the precious volume may find a place in every land, in every house, in every heart? Greatly must we rejoice in the unprecedented facilities now afforded for the extended circulation of the Holy Scriptures. Let the noble

institutions formed for this express purpose engage our most fervent prayers and most liberal contributions; and soon may the time arrive, when the knowledge of the best of books shall extend to every human being; when there shall be no longer occasion for one to say to another, "Know the Lord; for all shall know him, from the least even unto the greatest." Jer. xxxi. 34.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PLEASURES ARISING FROM THE EXERCISE OF THE AFFECTIONS IN RELIGION.

THE correctness of our ideas of the nature of true religion must depend, in no small degree, on assigning the proper place, both to the operations of the intellect, and to the emotions of the heart. It is more than possible to err, on the one hand, by attaching undue importance to speculative knowledge; and on the other, by undervaluing accuracy of religious sentiment. It is more than possible to err, on the one hand, by placing religion chiefly in feeling; and on the other, by depreciating the importance of the exercise of the affections. The religion of the God of wisdom makes its appeal, as might be expected, to the human understanding, and requires us to dis-

criminate between truth and error. The religion of the God of love makes its appeal, as might be expected, to the human heart, and requires us to be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Rom. xii. 11. The only religion which deserves the name has its commencement in knowledge, its continuance in love, and its consummation in joy.

The subject, then, to the consideration of which the present chapter is to be devoted, will not appear either uninteresting or unimportant. Our inquiries are to be directed to **THE PLEASURES ARISING FROM THE EXERCISE OF THE AFFECTIONS IN RELIGION.** Let us attend,

1. To the direct and immediate delight arising from this source.

What are the affections of our nature, but susceptibilities of deep and lively impression, designed and adapted by the Author of our existence to be at once sources of delight, and springs of activity? If, then; these susceptibilities be excited by proper objects, and regulated in the degree of excitement both by the real and the relative importance of those objects, they must, by the very constitution of our nature, be pleasurable as well as beneficial. Were we destitute of these sensibilities, the objects by which we are surrounded might indeed occupy, but could not interest us. Our hands and our intellect might be employed, but we could not possibly obtain enjoyment. Human life might exhibit a series of toilsome exertions, but it would present to view a scene

of unvarying and unrelieved dulness, enlivened by no taste of pleasure, cheered by no comfort of love, animated by no impulse of hope. Such, blessed be the Father of mercies, is not the character of human life, when under the influence of Christian principles, acting on the affections of the renewed heart.

The limits of a single chapter will not allow us to expatiate over the wide field here opening to our view. I must content myself with pointing out those affections which take the lead in rank and influence. Consider, then, the delight arising from the affections excited by contemplating good in possession; by contemplating good in prospect; and by contemplating the Divine Author of that good, and the joint participants of that good: in other words, the affections of Joy, of Hope, and of Love.

1. Let us direct our thoughts to the nature of Joy.

In the language of an accurate writer, "Joy is the vivid pleasure inspired by the immediate reception of something peculiarly grateful, of something obviously productive of essential advantage, or of something which promises to contribute to our present or future well-being. The delight may be communicated by our liberation from fearful apprehensions, or from a state of actual distress; by obtaining some new acquisition, some addition to our stock of enjoyment; or by the full assurance of this without any mixture of doubt." Now do you not perceive how well

and how fully this delineation of joy applies to the circumstances of a real Christian, who has cordially embraced the Gospel of Christ? From what fearful apprehensions, from what appalling dangers, from what actual distress is he completely liberated! He is delivered from the curse of God, the burden of guilt, the tormenting fear of future wrath, and the degrading vassalage of the most malignant enemy! He is reconciled to God by the death of his Son: his transgressions, aggravated as they have been, are all forgiven, and, "being justified by faith," he has "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. v. 1. Well may he yield his heart to joy, and now begin to taste of real blessedness. He has "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ," through whom he has received the atonement, Rom. v. 11; he is encouraged to "rejoice in the Lord always," even "with joy unspeakable and full of glory," Phil. iv. 4; 1 Pet. i. 8; and he is assured that of his joy no man can deprive him.

2. Let us advert to the nature of Hope.

"Hope has been styled the balm of life. It possesses the happy secret of anticipating the good we desire. By the pleasing emotions it communicates, we already taste the pleasures we seek." Its beneficial influence is felt and confessed in all the stages and in all the pursuits, in all the difficulties and in all the trials of human life. But where has hope such excitement or such scope as in true religion? What are the revelations and the pro-

mises of future glory, which enrich the sacred volume, but the food and aliment of hope? Is it possible to cherish a good and steadfast hope of future happiness, and not find in its exercise a lively pleasure—a high degree of vivid delight? Who is the happy man, if it be not the man who, placing his reliance on the promises of an unchanging God, gives constant and successful diligence to the attainment of the full assurance of hope? Happy he must be, who, whether in sickness or in health, whether in poverty or in affluence, holds fast a hope full of immortality and full of glory; a hope of a crown never to fade, of a kingdom never to be moved, of an inheritance never to be defiled! The very thoughts and conceptions of felicity which such a hope renders familiar to the mind, must be elements of the purest joy; how much more than the well-founded expectation of soon appropriating and eternally enjoying the full amount of that blessedness, the imperfect and inadequate idea of any single part of which, fills his mind with unearthly and exquisite delight! But it is,

3. To the affection of Love that I wish particularly to direct your thoughts; it is to that affection especially, which is excited by contemplating the Divine Author of all the good which we enjoy in the present world, and hope for in the world to come. What is that good, in its utmost extent and amplitude, but a stream from the Fountain of blessedness, which he can widen, and deepen, and quicken, at his pleasure! He is himself that Fountain,

the eternal and inexhaustible Fountain of happiness. He is himself infinitely good, unbounded goodness; he is himself infinitely lovely, unbounded love! Angels that never sinned sing of his love with seraphic fervour and most adoring admiration; but surely our gratitude, our admiration, and our attachment should exceed even theirs! His love to them appears in preserving their high felicity, and in keeping them from falling: his love to us appears in raising us from a state of most abject wretchedness, and horrid guilt, and total ruin. His love to us appears in the person and the sufferings of his beloved Son, the Sovereign and the glory of heaven. How is it that this Lord of angels, this Ruler of the universe, appears on the throne in human form, clothed with a body like our own? Most radiant it is in glory, but still it exhibits a nature which, in itself considered, is inferior to that of angels! What is the history of this incarnation; this condescension? Oh, Christians, you know it well! You know what love it expresses on his part, what love it demands on yours: You know, to your ineffable joy, in what a lovely and attractive aspect it presents to your view the character of the Father of mercies, the Giver of the unspeakable gift! To cherish towards him the warmest love of your heart seems now perfectly natural, necessary, and delightful. You are now prepared to bless God, that he requires your love, excites your love, accepts your love. You can say, with an eminently



holy man, "My greatest obligation to God, next to the gift of Jesus Christ and his Spirit, is for commanding me to love him with all my heart." Do you not find a sacred delight in cultivating this affection? Is not the degree of its exercise the measure of your happiness? Is there not a lively pleasure in cherishing this love to him who loved you, and gave himself for you, and redeemed you by his most precious blood? Is there not a high delight in the exercise of this affection towards him who, by his renewing influence, creates in your hearts a susceptibility of the noblest and the purest joys, and sheds abroad in your soul the love of God? "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. We love him, because he first loved us." 1 John iv. 16, 19.

But with the love of God there is and ever must be associated another exercise of holy affection. The love of the heart to the Divine Author of blessedness must be connected with love to those who are joint participants in this blessedness. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love.—Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." 1 John iv. 7, 8, 11, 21. On the obligation

and on the reasonableness of these injunctions I cannot now dwell; but I would wish it to be impressed upon your minds, that in the exercise of the affections, according to these Divine requirements, there is real and high delight. It is not an inconsiderate or unguarded assertion, that in the legitimate and prescribed exercise of the affections in religion, there is designed to be, and there actually is a pleasure, rising by gradations which it is not difficult to trace, from the more gentle to the most blissful emotions of delight.

There is a certain pleasurable emotion of regard which we feel even towards many of the inferior animals which have been domesticated by our kindness, and which are capable of expressing as well as of exciting attachment. There is a pleasure of a much higher character, of which we are conscious, when we cherish disinterested kindness towards any being of our own species, however low his rank or mean his talents. There is a pleasure in relieving the wants and promoting the happiness of any of our fellow men, whether nearer to us or more remote. There is a pleasure highly joyous, in the exercise of the social affections in all the endearing relations of life, and in all the intercourse of genuine friendship; but most of all, when to the claims of nature and relationship are super-added the attractions of Divine grace, so that those whom we love for their own sake, we love also "for the truth's sake which dwelleth in them," 2 John 2, and for their resemblance

to the God whom we adore, and the Saviour whom we love! There is a holy pleasure in brotherly love, when, independently of all other considerations, we cherish kind and fraternal regard towards the disciples of Jesus, entirely for his sake, recognizing their relation to him, and feeling that relationship itself to exercise over our hearts the power of a strong attraction. There is a high degree of delight in the display of that catholic spirit of brotherhood, which rises superior to all the distinctions of country, and rank, and sect, and condition, and allows none of these things to be erected into barriers over which it cannot pass. In proportion as the heart is expanded with this heavenly love, we have the foretaste of heavenly happiness. "Let brotherly love continue. See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." Heb. xiii. 1; 1 Pet. i. 22.

Let me now direct your thoughts,

II. To the pleasurable and powerful influence of the affections, on the mind, and on the character of a Christian.

View that influence as it appears,

1. In the excitement given by the exercise of the affections to the operations of the intellect.

In a former chapter, I endeavoured to exhibit the pleasures arising from the knowledge of Divine truth, and the study of the word of God; and now it is my object to show, that those pleasures never have been and never can be realized, to any considerable extent,

without the aid and impulse of the affections. In obtaining those pleasures, the mind cannot give a merely passive reception to ideas pressed upon its regard. It must be highly active, habitually energetic and diligent in the investigation of the Scriptures and the study of Divine truth. But will the mind be brought into this state, and retained in this state, without powerful excitement? And can that excitement be produced, without the impulse of the affections? How is it in all our intellectual pursuits? Can you induce any one to prosecute a course of energetic study, without the incitement of some cogent motive? and can that motive be brought to bear upon the mind independently of the affections and passions? What is it which renders the lesson and the task so wearisome and irksome to the inconsiderate school-boy? He feels no interest in the study; and, unless an interest be felt in the pursuit itself, he cannot be brought to learn it, except by rousing his fear of disgrace and punishment; or by stimulating his desire of reward and distinction. What, on the other hand, is it which renders the pursuit of literature and science so inviting and agreeable to many who have arrived at years of maturity, and have made progress in such studies? It is that they have a taste for these pursuits, that they have a decided and powerful predilection for them, that their hearts are in them. The attachment of some is said even to rise to enthusiastic ardour; and this very enthusiasm is admired, because it leads

to eminence. And what is it which urges the man of business to so much unremitted diligence in the prosecution of his affairs, amid difficulties, and fatigues, and disappointments? It is the desire of success; it is the love of acquiring riches, or at least of attaining a competency. His heart is in his pursuits. In all these instances, the passions are the grand stimulants to activity. Without them, this busy and active world would exhibit an entire stagnation of effort. Activity would cease, and all would become motionless, supine, and dormant. And without the exercise of the affections, would it not be thus in religion; and especially with regard to the attainment of Divine knowledge? Why is it that many who hear the gospel are strangers to these acquisitions and their concomitant pleasures? They hear its truths discussed and illustrated with clearness, and perhaps with force; yet is there produced no effect, unless of a nature slight and evanescent. The fact is, that their powers of attention, of discrimination, and of memory, are but half employed, but half awake. And why is this the case? It is because they have no love to the truth; no deep impression of its value, no earnest desire of attaining Divine knowledge; their hearts are not engaged in the study of the word of God.

Mark now the difference between persons of this character, and such as are deriving from the treasures of Divine truth their highest intellectual delights. These love the truth:

it touches their hearts; it interests their affections; and thus the heart acts as the main spring of the intellect. It aids the operations of the powers of knowledge, "not indeed by any direct influence, but by means of a powerful and pleasurable excitement, which keeps the mind steady to its object." When this is not the case, the attention becomes languid; it is perpetually interrupted, and with difficulty recalled. The truths inviting its regard may be nothing less than those which pertain to the glorious redemption of the Son of God, the value of the immortal soul, the felicities of the heavenly world; yet the mind may still be listless, because the heart is not impressed. When, on the other hand, the affections are engaged; oh, what interest is felt, what attention is excited, what feelings are awakened, what pleasures are enjoyed! The Lord grant that *your* experience may elucidate the meaning, and attest the importance of the distinctions thus traced; and may the Spirit of light and of love impart to you, in rich abundance, these sacred delights!

Contemplate the pleasurable influence of the affections,

2. On the performance of the duties of holiness.

If we be "fervent in spirit," it will be easy and delightful to be engaged in "serving the Lord." Rom. xii. 11. As the appetites of hunger and thirst prompt us to partake of food, without waiting for the slower and more calm considerations of reason; so the affec-

tions of our nature are designed to impel us, by powerful feeling, to every act of holy obedience. "They are a sort of life and fire which the Creator has implanted in the heart, to be ever ready to give force and fervour for action, that we may be prepared to run in the way of obedience with alacrity and vigour."

Observe, in the character of Apollos, the influence of this fervour, in stimulating to active and zealous efforts to promote the glory of God and the happiness of men. "A certain Jew," it is recorded, "named Apollos, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord.—And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. And he helped them much who had believed through grace: for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ." Acts xviii. 24—28. Observe the influence of the same fervour of spirit on the character and ministry of Epaphras, the pastor of the Colossian church, in exciting his devotional diligence in favour of the people of his charge. "Epaphras," writes the Apostle, "who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis." Col. iv. 12, 13. Observe the

effect of the same spirit on the great apostle himself, urging him at once to the most arduous labours in his ministry, and to the most solicitous pursuit of personal holiness. "Being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblamably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: as ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory." 1 Thess. ii. 8—12. Observe the unparalleled display of the same spirit in the character and ministry of him who is the great apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus. It was written of him, ages before his advent, and by himself were the words both adopted and exemplified, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." *Psa. lxxix. 9.* To his devoted heart the most exhausting labours, and the most agonizing sorrows, were even objects of desire; for he could say, in the hours of fatigue and abstinence, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of: my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. —Lo, I come to do thy will, O my God; thy



law is within my heart." John iv. 32, 34; Psa. xl. 7, 8. Yes, and he could say, under the pressure of a load of anguish, which he only could sustain, "Not my will, but thine, be done." Luke xxii. 42. "For the joy which was set before him," the joy of love, the joy of bringing many sons to glory, he even endured the pangs, and despised the ignominy of the cross. Heb. xii. 2.

It remains for me to intreat your regard,

III. To the instructive and practical inferences which we should deduce from the consideration of this subject.

1. They must be egregiously mistaken who discard from religion the exercise of the affections.

As there can be no genuine religion where there is heat without light, so neither can there be where there is light without heat. What would it avail a man, could he attain the clearest notions of the doctrines and duties of religion, if, while his intellect obtained a store of systematic opinions, his heart remained cold and dead? Is not the entire absence of true religion often represented in the word of God as evinced by hardness of heart? and what is this but the absence of religious affections, the want of spiritual susceptibility in the feelings of the soul? There may be much constitutional sensibility; there may be no want of that order of amiable feelings, which endears the individual to relatives and friends, and which opens the heart to benevolent sympathy with objects of distress: and yet to-

wards God, the God of love, the heart may be cold and hard! But must there not be an awful criminality in withholding and alienating the best affections of the heart from him who has the first and the strongest claims on our love, the language of all whose mercies is, "Give me thine heart?" Prov. xxiii. 26. Would it be criminal, not to love an affectionate father, or a tender mother, or a generous benefactor? What then must be the guilt of living without the love of God? The absence of love to God and to the Saviour is the most characteristic feature of a depraved heart; it is an entire disqualification for every act of acceptable homage and obedience: it must be fatal to the pursuit of true felicity; it is a sufficient ground of condemnation before the dread tribunal; it will be, in truth, the very ground of exclusion at the last day, from the regions of eternal blessedness! "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be," said the most benevolent of men, "Anathema Maran-atha," 1 Cor. xvi. 22, subject to the curse of God, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall appear in his glory! Let me then most earnestly beseech you to examine, with the strictest scrutiny, your own hearts, in order to ascertain whether the principle of love to God and love to Christ has been implanted there. Consider the searching interrogation, three times addressed to Peter, as addressed to you, "Lovest thou me?" Happy are you if you can say—but most deeply anxious ought you to be, if you cannot say—"Lord, thou know-

est all things; thou knowest that I love thee." John xxi. 15—17.

2. There is an obvious and indispensable necessity for the exertion of regenerating grace.

If the carnal mind be not only destitute of love to God, but is even enmity against him, it must be contrary to its very nature to cherish towards the blessed Jehovah any emotions of real and genuine attachment. "It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Rom. viii. 7. It is not susceptible of love to God, neither indeed can it be. Its tendencies, and predilections, and habits, instead of constituting a disposition favourable to the love of God, constitute a disposition whose language towards him is, "we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Job xxi. 14. What further evidence can we need of the absolute necessity of a change of nature, a transformation of character, an entire renovation of heart? To be the subject of such a change is, in the expressive language of Divine truth, to be "born again," to be "born of the Spirit;" and He who is to be our Judge has expressly said, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John iii. 3, 5. Can any inquiry be more momentous, or to any one of us more appropriate, than the question arising out of this declaration, "Have I been born again?"

3. An enlightened regard to our true happiness, requires the habitual cultivation of holy and heavenly affections.

If there be so much delight in the very exercise of the affections in religion; and if, by their exercise, an influence so beneficial be produced on the mind and on the character, assuredly it is the dictate of enlightened reason, as well as the requirement of the word of God, to cultivate, with daily solicitude, the best affections of the soul. With this view, then, let us value those books which not only inform the mind, but are also adapted to excite the devotional aspirations of the heart, and the most heavenly affections of the soul. Let us daily read the Scriptures with this express design. Let us meditate much on those delightful subjects which have the most powerful tendency to awaken and to strengthen our best affections. Let us especially dwell much in our meditations on the love of Christ, and *that* will have the most direct tendency to kindle in our breasts "the flame of never-dying love." Above all, let us most earnestly implore the influences of the Holy Spirit, whose most gracious and condescending office it is, to take of the things which are Christ's, to show them unto us, and to shed abroad the love of God in our hearts. John xvi. 15. Rom. v. 5. May he ever dwell within us, consecrating our souls as his living temples, and filling them with all the fulness of God!

## CHAPTER V.

## THE PLEASURES OF OBEDIENCE TO THE WILL OF GOD.

HAPPY is the man who can say from his heart, "I delight to do thy will, O my God." Such *might* have been the language of the first of men, when, opening his eyes upon the enchanting beauties of Eden, he traced the diversified streams of pleasure by which he was surrounded, to the uncreated Source of all delight; and identified the bliss of his joyous existence with unreserved obedience to the law written on his heart. Such *was* the language of "the Second Adam, the Lord from heaven," the Son of God incarnate, when, entering our world, then labouring under the curse, he anticipated the sorrows and the sufferings of his course of obedience unto death. In full accordance with the spirit of these words, although in reference to a less arduous and less elevated sphere of obedience, should every disciple of the Saviour be prepared to reiterate the sentiment, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." Psa. xl. 8. To those who are disposed and qualified to adopt this language as their own, it will not be a difficult task to exhibit the pleasures of unreserved obedience to the will of God. Happy indeed will it be if, by the illuminating influences of the Spirit of God, others also should be led to discover

and to pursue the same substantial delights; and to learn, by experience, that the ways of obedience are the ways of pleasantness and the paths of peace. Let it then be observed,

I. That it is pleasurable to cherish the full persuasion, that the God whom we serve is supremely worthy of our most devoted obedience.

This is a persuasion which no idolater can perfectly entertain, even on his own principles, towards the object or objects of his worship. In the characters attributed to the heathen deities, there is so much that is defective, and so much that is unamiable, that only a partial and limited service can appear to be due, even in the estimation of their most devoted adherents; and the obedience rendered, being the tribute of fear rather than of attachment, is yielded not with delight but with reluctance. When in the presence of a company of idolaters, with what holy elevation and complacency in the character of Jehovah, as the only living and true God, did the apostle of the Gentiles announce an immediate communication from heaven; when on his voyage to Italy, and during the unabated violence of the storm, he said, "There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not." Acts xxvii. 23, 24. At that exulting moment, he felt that to belong to God, and to be the servant of the Most High, was the truest dignity of man: that it was an honour which he shared with the angel who had been despatched as

the messenger of peace and safety; and that it was an honour, greater than which, the heaven of heavens has none to confer. Is it not a part of the description of the heavenly world, and of the happiness there enjoyed, that "his servants serve him; that they see his face; that his name is in their foreheads;" and that they exclaim in rapturous adoration, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." Rev. iv. 11. With sentiments then, in harmony with theirs, let the servant of God upon earth say in sincerity and truth, "It is the joy and triumph of my heart, that I serve the blessed and only Potentate, who made heaven and earth, and all that in them is. Over all worlds he reigns with power unlimited and uncontrolled; and it is my daily joy that he acts according to his pleasure, in all places of his dominion. I rejoice that he is as good as he is great, and that his tender mercies are over all his works. I rejoice that justice and judgment are the basis of his throne; that mercy and truth go before his face, Psa. lxxxix. 14; and that wisdom and knowledge have in them a depth of unsearchable riches. To the service of such a Being it is equally my duty and my honour to be devoted. Adored be his goodness for an attractive revelation of his character and his claims. I rejoice in regarding every perfection of his character as a proof of the reasonableness of his claims, and a pledge of the

blessedness of obedience. To his service I consecrate myself without reserve. Less than unreserved obedience he could not require; less I would not yield."

II. It is pleasurable to indulge a deep sense of the obligations to obedience; arising from the redemption of the Son of God.

If you have ever found the feeling or the expression of gratitude to be painful rather than pleasurable, it must have been in some case in which you could take no complacency in the character of the individual from whom the favour was received. There was something in that individual which rendered the sense of obligation unwelcome and oppressive; and to owe much to one of such a character would be in a high degree distressing. The very reverse of this takes place when we receive benefits from the God of love. Since he delights in giving, well may we rejoice in receiving and acknowledging favours undeserved. Some of these mercies are so incalculably great, and are conveyed in a manner so unparalleled and amazing, that the gratitude inspired is of a nature which words are altogether inadequate to express. Such are the blessings to which the apostle adverts when he says, "I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Rom. xii. 1. What those mercies are, we learn from the cross of him who died for the ungodly. We are "not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver



and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. We are not our own, but "bought with a price;" and are therefore to esteem it our first duty, and our highest happiness to "glorify God with our bodies and spirits which are his." 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. And is there no pleasure in yielding the heart to the deep and overwhelming sense of this obligation? Say, ye that love the Saviour, have those been the happiest moments, in which you have felt the *slightest*, or the *strongest* sense of obligation to him who loved you, and gave himself for you; in which your minds seemed scarcely to retain the impression of his love, or in which you have felt its mightiest and resistless power? To feel that you have contracted a debt to Divine *justice* which you could never pay, has indeed, in days that are past, filled you with alarm and consternation; but to feel, as now you feel, that you have contracted a debt to Divine *love* which you can never pay, fills you, it is true, with deep humility, but not less with gratitude, and love, and joy! It is happiness to owe so much to goodness so great, and to love so pure. Instead of oppressing the mind, it is the occasion of bringing it oftener and nearer to the throne of grace and to the foun-

tain of bliss. There is a pleasure in acknowledging—

“The debt immense of endless gratitude,  
Not burdensome, still paying, still to owe;  
Joyfully feeling, that a grateful mind,  
By owing owes not, but still pays, at once  
Indebted and discharged—what burden then!”

III. It is delightful to the mind to have the full conviction, that all the requirements of God are both designed and adapted to promote our happiness.

This conviction dwelt strongly in the mind of the disciple whom Jesus loved, when under the guidance of the Spirit of inspiration he affirmed, that “the commandments of God are not grievous.” 1 John v. 3. It dwelt, ages before, in the mind of the inspired psalmist, who declared that “in keeping his commandments there is great reward.” Psa. xix. 11. That with these representations our own sentiments may fully accord, let it be recollected,

1. That there is no precept of the Divine law, to which obedience may not be required, on the principle of love.

Does the blessed God require me to render adoration to himself alone, and in his worship to refrain from the use of images, degrading to his majesty; and does he charge me never to pronounce his name without the deepest veneration? I am impelled to obey these precepts by the principle of love; for how can I at once love him, and withhold the honour due to his name? Does he require me to con-

secrete to him the day which he has appropriated and hallowed? I am impelled to obey this precept by the principle of love; for how can I at once love him, and disregard the wise and gracious institutions by which he designs to bring me nearer to himself? Does he require me to honour my parents, and in all the relations and intercourse of life; to guard against every action and every disposition, which would be injurious to the persons, or the property, or the character of my fellow men? I am impelled to obey these precepts by the principle of love; for how can I love God whom I have not seen, if I love not my brother whom I have seen? and how can I love my brother, and my neighbour, and not consult their rights and their happiness? How then can I hesitate to yield unreserved obedience to him, whose law requires only the development of the principle of love? and how can I cherish that affection, without at the same time most effectually promoting my own enjoyment?

2. Let it be recollected, that the grand design of all the precepts of God is to promote our holiness.

There might be prefixed to all the requirements of God, as a characteristic motto, these words of the apostle, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." 1 Thess. iv. 3. With this will, O Christian, does not your own fully coincide? Are you not fully prepared to exclaim, "My heart's desire is that I may be holy. I aspire to that perfect purity,

in which the nature of man exhibits the beautiful image of the God of holiness; and I will bind to my heart those precepts which are designed to secure this glorious result. Thy word, O my God, is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it. I delight to do thy will; yea, thy law is within my heart. Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, may it ever be my desire and delight to think on these things." Psa. cxix. 140; xl. 8. Phil. iv. 8.

3. Let it be recollected, that a gracious and most abundant recompense is attached to all those acts of obedience which are attended with self-denial and with costly sacrifices.

Not unfrequently does the Son of God call his servants to some department of labour, which may require the relinquishment of ease and comfort, and of the favour of the world; and sometimes of liberty, and even of life. But hear the words of the Saviour: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." Matt. v. 11, 12. Then, with such a prospect, the sufferers in the cause of Christ are not to be pitied; rather might they be regarded as objects of envy. So far will their recompense exceed, in degree and duration,

the amount of their sufferings, that they will be unspeakably and incalculably gainers by every loss. If these views be correct, does it not follow, that even under circumstances the most discouraging, there is the greatest inducement to yield ourselves, without reserve, to the service of God, and that, in doing this, we best consult our own true happiness?

IV. It is powerfully conducive to our satisfaction and delight, to attain a habit of firm decision on points of the highest importance!

Since no man *can* serve God and mammon, that man *must* be unhappy, who is ever making and repeating the same unsuccessful experiment. He is not prepared to avow to the world, nor even to his own heart, that he renounces altogether the service of God, and all profession of obedience to his will; still less is he prepared to renounce the service and the friendship of the world. He resorts to the incongruous expedient of a vague and ambiguous profession of religion, without even wishing to be regarded as a decided and devoted servant of Christ. He frames for himself a most unscriptural system of principles and rules of life, accommodated to his own perverted views. When the duties and the sacrifices, enjoined on the disciples of Christ, are pressed upon his regard, he imagines that he need not feel the force of the obligation, because he makes no public profession of personal and decided piety. On the other hand, when the warnings and threatenings, denounced against sinners, are urged upon his

conscience, with all the earnestness of ministerial fidelity, he shields himself against their force, by the fallacious subterfuge, that he is not *altogether* destitute of religion, and is not therefore *directly* aimed at, by the denunciations levelled against the ungodly and profane. Thus, by a strange infatuation, he pleads at one time that he is *not* a Christian, in order to avoid the obligation of present duty; and at another time that he *is* a Christian, in order to avoid the dread of future punishment. Whether he can have any valid pretensions whatever to the character of a Christian, even of the very lowest order, is a question which he is always anxious to evade. It is this very state of uncertainty, accompanied by this undefined profession, which becomes the occasion of protracting the vain and wretched attempt to unite the service of God with the friendship of the world. But is he happy at heart under the covert of this wilful delusion? He is *not* happy. It is in the very nature of things impossible that he should be happy. His conscience has too much light to allow it perpetually to slumber. It whispers, if it speak not in thunders, the language of reproach and alarm. Sometimes it seems almost to compel him, by its remonstrances, to form a resolution of abandoning the service of the world: but still indecision continues; while his disquieted, struggling, baffled conscience, though it cannot prevail, inflicts on his heart many a wound, and infixes many a sting.

From all this misery the man is exempted,

who yields cheerful and unreserved obedience to the will of God. He hesitates not between two conflicting opinions. His resolution has been taken and carried into effect, determined that whatever others do, he will serve the Lord. He is distinguished by one uniform principle of action; by one even tenor of conduct; by one dignified and consistent course of life. Let it clearly appear to him, that any line of conduct accords with the will of God, he hesitates not to pursue it. He asks not in what light it will be regarded by the world; or whether it will expose him to reproach or ridicule, or whether it may prove injurious to his worldly interests: it is sufficient for him to know, that it is the requirement of God: he finds it a good and a happy thing to have "the heart established with grace," Heb. xiii. 9; and he has a daily source of pure and tranquil satisfaction in his own mind, from being, under all circumstances, prepared to say, "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." Psa. xl. 8.

V. It is a source of high delight to receive those Divine attestations to Christian character, and those communications of spiritual joy, which may be expected in a course of unreserved obedience.

You wish, it may be presumed, most ardently, to ascertain, whether you are personally interested in the blessings of the great salvation, and authorized to exult in the hope of approaching glory. You are well aware, that if you are the children of God, by faith in

Christ Jesus, the prospect of futurity is beyond expression blissful. With a view to prosecute the momentous inquiry, you thus read in the epistle to the Romans, "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live: For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Rom. viii. 11, 12. From this representation, then, you learn, that *they* have the evidence of being the children of God, who, by the influence of the Holy Spirit, are led to resist every forbidden propensity, and to pursue a course of unreserved obedience to the will of God. It is added, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." Ver. 16, 17. Our own spirit, then, bears witness in our favour, when, enlightened by Divine truth, it testifies, that it is our habitual desire and delight to do the will of God. With this testimony of our own conscience, the Spirit of God bears a concurrent testimony in our favour. He invigorates the holy principles and dispositions which he has himself implanted, so that we have a distinct and decided consciousness of their existence; and he enables us to discern the correspondence between that which we feel in ourselves, and that which we read in the Scriptures, with regard to the discriminating marks and tests of Christian character. The happy result, then, of this concurrent testimony is the inference legiti-



mately drawn, that we are the children of God and the heirs of glory. Oh, is it not most joyous to arrive on solid grounds at this conclusion? Do you not trace, in every part of the process thus described, the intimate and necessary connexion between this gladdening inference, and a course of willing, cordial, unreserved obedience to the will of God?

To a similar train of reflections we shall be led, if we advert to the gracious assurances of the Saviour, recorded in the fourteenth chapter of the gospel of John. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him;—and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." John xiv. 21, 23. Unreserved obedience to the will of Christ is here represented as the grand evidence of love to him; and to every one who thus evinces his attachment, there is given one of the most glorious promises contained in the book of God. "I will love him," said the Saviour; "and my Father will love him, as one of his adopted children; and I will manifest myself to him. I will reveal myself by the light of my countenance, and make known to him the love of my heart. He shall pass his days on earth, with the assurance of my favour, and the kindest intimacies of my friendship. His heart shall be the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit, whom I will send as the Comforter, and who shall not depart." If such be the import of our

Saviour's words, do you not perceive that the attainment of spiritual joys, resulting from Divine communications, is inseparably connected with that obedience, which is the appointed and the natural expression of our love? Does it not sufficiently appear, that of all the children of men upon the face of the earth, he must of necessity be the happiest who, with the greatest cheerfulness, alacrity, and diligence, obeys the will of God, and makes the nearest approximation to the character of his beloved Master and perfect Exemplar, saying, from his inmost soul, "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." Psa. xl. 8.

With a view to some practical improvement of the subject, I would observe,

1. That they who decline the service of God are chargeable with folly no less than with guilt.

From the considerations adduced it appears, that they who refuse obedience to the will of God, abandon the true and only way of happiness, they forsake the fountain of living waters, and hew out to themselves broken cisterns which can hold no water. Jer. ii. 13. "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy." Jonah ii. 8. "What fruit had ye," asks the apostle, "in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death." Rom. vi. 21. No one ever repented of engaging, with all his heart and with all his strength, in the service of God; but thousands have bitterly repented of

addicting themselves to the service of sin. "If I had served my God as I have served my king," exclaimed the disappointed Wolsey, "he would not have forsaken me in my old age." "If I had served the Lord as I have served the world," myriads might exclaim, "he would not have abandoned me to the sting of death, and the gnawing of the worm that never dies!" O, then, if any of you are still walking "according to the course of this world," renounce, before it be too late, the service of sin. To continue in that service, even another day, would expose you to hazard incalculably tremendous. Hesitate no longer. Choose ye this day whom ye will serve. Direct your imploring and believing views to that Divine Redeemer, whose blood can cleanse you from the awful guilt you have contracted, by innumerable acts of disobedience and rebellion. Remember that the very first act of acceptable obedience, is to believe on the name of the Son of God; and under the impulses of love to him who died for the ungodly, may you consecrate to him your heart, your life, your all.

2. We cannot be sufficiently thankful, that the will of God is so clearly revealed, and so powerfully enforced in the word of truth.

How perplexing and bewildering were the disputatious reasonings of the ancient sages, on the nature and the standard of virtue; and how defective were the clearest views they entertained, and the best rules of life they formed. Blessed be God, he has shown us

what is good, and what it is which he requires of us. The general requirements of his will are, that we should "do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with our God," Micah vi. 8; and the minuter directions are given us, either by express precept, or by still more impressive examples, in order "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Tim. iii. 17. Let the word of God then be to us the rule of life. Instead of aiming, with the deluded Antinomian, to establish an immunity from the obligation of that law which is "holy and just, and good," Rom. vii. 12, let us rejoice that it is immutable and eternal. Blessed be God for the motives to obedience which we derive from the cross of Christ. If we are redeemed from the condemning power of the law which we had violated, it is that the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us, by our walking, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Rom. viii. 4.

3. Let it be our daily prayer, that we may receive these aids of the Holy Spirit, without which we cannot serve God.

When we would serve God, do we not often feel our incompetency? Whatever difficulties we find in entering into some parts of the experience of the apostle Paul, we feel no difficulty in adopting the language of his bitter lamentation; "To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do.—I

find then a law that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin." Rom. vii. 18, 19, 21—23. Under the distressing consciousness of so much evil and so much inability, how cheering is the assurance that God, by his Holy Spirit, can work in us both to will and to do according to his own good pleasure, Phil. ii. 13; and that it is perfectly easy for the omnipotent Spirit to exert a power, which can bear down all opposition, and overcome every counteracting principle. For the glorious exertion of that power, let our most fervent petitions perpetually ascend to him who heareth prayer, and who has absolutely engaged to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him.

4. Let us exult in the hope of full qualifications for obedience in the heavenly world.

Oh what force and beauty is there in that concise petition, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!" Were one of the heavenly hosts permitted to address us on the subject which has now been occupying our attention, how glowing and how rapturous a description would he give, of the pleasures resulting from unreserved obedience to the will of God! With what seraphic eloquence would he show us, that in heaven, to hear is to obey, and to obey is to be blessed; that beholding the unvaried glory of every Divine

perfection, they love supremely him that sitteth on the throne; and loving him supremely, with eager promptitude they carry into effect his every command. Say, then, Christian, to the joy and solace of thy heart, "I shall one day—nor is the day far distant—be in these respects even as the angels that do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word. In purity like theirs, I shall stand before the throne; with alacrity like theirs, I shall rejoice in every act of homage and obedience; with songs like theirs, I shall celebrate the attributes of my God and the achievements of my Redeemer; and, surely in one point I shall surpass even them—in love and gratitude to him who loved me and gave himself for me. Under the animating influence of that love, may I spend the short remainder of my days on earth, ever prepared to say, as he said, whom my soul loveth, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart!'" Psa. xl. 8.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PLEASURES OF PRAYER AND PRAISE.

THAT prayer and praise are duties incumbent on us all, we may be assured on principles which reason asserts, and revelation explicitly

confirms. If God be the Author of our existence, then our relation to him, as his dependent creatures, should be humbly acknowledged. If the attributes of his nature comprise all that is good, as well as all that is great, then adoration must be unquestionably due. If his bounties flow to us in an uninterrupted stream, that stream should be gratefully traced to its Divine and unbounded source. If he condescend not only to permit, but even to invite our supplications and thanksgivings, these offerings of the heart should be regarded as a reasonable and delightful service. If it be his benevolent design that they should become means of happiness, as well as means of grace, then the inducements to prayer and to praise are the most powerful which can possibly be presented to our minds. That they are so designed is evident from the words of the apostle: "Rejoice evermore." 1 Thess. v. 16. Yield yourselves to the sacred pleasures which the gospel provides; and, with a view to the full enjoyment of these delights, "Pray without ceasing," and "in every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Ver. 17, 18.

Let me then invite your regard to the characteristics of these pleasures, and to the conclusions which they authorize.

FIRST. Consider the characteristics of these pleasures. Let your attention be directed,

1. To the pleasures which both prayer and praise are alike adapted to yield.

*In both we enjoy intimate communion with God.*

There is not any truth connected with personal religion, more frequently brought to the test of experience—than this—that “it is good for us to draw near to God.” Psa. lxxiii. 28. Whence arises the greatest pleasure, as well as the greatest benefit of contemplating the works of God? Is it not from discovering the traces with which they abound, of the wisdom by which they were contrived, the power by which they were created, and the goodness by which they were adapted to impart delight? Must there not then be a pleasure and an advantage still greater, in more realizing views of these perfections; when, closing the eye of sense on the objects which surround us, we fix the eye of the mind on the blessed God himself, and say with the patriarch of Uz, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee?” Job xlii. 5. In a direct approach to God, our views of his glorious character become more clear, more vivid, and more pleasurable. In the act of adoring him for his goodness, our minds become more impressed with a sense of his goodness. In the act of adoring him for his holiness, we discern more of the beauty of holiness. In the act of imploring his favour and friendship, we attain more impressive views of the blessedness which his favour imparts. In the act of offering praise for his unspeakable gift, and for the salvation



of his beloved Son, the character of the Redeemer appears more than ever lovely, his work more glorious, himself more precious, and his service more delightful. These are the pleasurable effects of drawing near to God: but be it remembered, that he also draws near to us; that he manifests himself to us, by the joy-inspiring light of his countenance, and that he augments our happiness by direct communications of his grace; so that we may unite with an apostle in saying, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." 1 John i. 3.

*In both prayer and praise we enjoy the happiness of approaching to God, through our Divine Mediator and Intercessor.*

"I am prepared to present to God," said the impious Rousseau, "a soul as pure as it came from his hands." If you cannot, if you dare not say this, then you cannot approach to God without a Mediator. Were it not for a medium of access adapted to encourage the heart of a suppliant conscious of guilt, terror and confusion, instead of tranquillity and delight, would be attendant on every approach of a sinner, to a just and holy God. But, through the riches of his grace, we have now "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." Heb. x. 19—22. Is not our adorable Intercessor

represented, in the book of the Revelation, by a beautiful emblem borrowed from the ancient sanctuary, as offering the prayers of the saints, intermingled with his own incense, on the golden altar which is before the throne? May I not then enjoy a sacred pleasure in drawing near to God through him? It is true, I am unworthy of every mercy which I ask; and the sense of that unworthiness might almost extinguish my hopes, and fill me with apprehensions of failure; but I will commit my petitions to my condescending Advocate and powerful Intercessor, well assured that in his hands no supplication can fail of success. By him also will I offer the sacrifice of praise unto God continually, even the fruit of my lips, giving thanks to his name. Heb. xiii. 15.

*In both prayer and praise we cherish those feelings and affections, which are directly calculated to promote our highest enjoyments.*

We resort to the throne of grace, that we may obtain the full and free remission of all our sins. We recognize, and we plead before our God, the grand principles which are the glory of the everlasting gospel. While we plead them with persevering fervour, they take a firmer hold on our own minds; they produce a steadfast, a tranquillizing, and a grateful reliance on the promises of the covenant of grace; and we enter in some degree into the blessedness of the man "whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, and to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity."

**Psa. xxxii. 1, 2.** Now this process of thought, and of petition, and of peaceful confidence, is more or less repeated in our devotional engagements, every day we live: surely, then, it cannot fail to produce a powerful influence on the frame and habits of our minds; disposing and preparing us more and more to rejoice in the God of our salvation, with the lively emotions of a grateful heart.

We resort to the throne of grace, that we may offer our petitions for the attainment of resemblance to the mind of Christ, and conformity to the image of the Son of God. We implore the communications of heavenly grace, to enable us to cultivate the humility, the meekness, the gentleness, the patience, the spirituality, the purity, the love, the sympathy, and the zeal by which the perfect character of the Saviour was so gloriously distinguished. While in the act of praying for these lovely graces, they appear in our eyes more than ever beautiful and attractive; we yield ourselves, with the full current of powerful feeling, to the influence of the motives which urge to their cultivation; and, by the aid of that Spirit whose grace we implore, they obtain in some degree, the ascendancy in our hearts. This process of contemplation, and desire, and petition, is more or less repeated every day: Must there not then be a growth in grace, producing a correspondent augmentation of happiness?

We resort to the throne of grace that we may attain a spirit of entire acquiescence in

all the appointments and dispensations of the Father of mercies. In the act of humble devotion, we resign ourselves and all our concerns to the disposal of infinite wisdom and infinite love: and, while thus engaged, we make progress in the exercise of a filial submission and cheerful resignation; we learn a lesson of freedom from anxious and corroding care; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, begins to diffuse its serene influence over our minds. The success of our petitions awakens the spirit of gratitude, and inspires the song of praise; so that both in the act of imploring, and in the act of acknowledging the influence of Divine grace, we are conscious of an augmentation of delight.

Let your attention be directed,

2. To the superiority of the pleasures of praise above those of prayer.

*In praise, our attention is directed, not to our wants, but to our enjoyments.*

Let a man be perpetually employed in the consideration of his exigencies and privations, and a degree of depressing gloom will, in all probability, tinge his views, and overspread his prospects. On the contrary, let a man be much employed in reflecting on his various enjoyments, and on all the propitious circumstances of his lot, and the result must be decidedly favourable to his happiness. On the same principles, the habit of thanksgiving is conducive to delight. Arising from a sense of mercies received, it deepens the impression of their value, and of the goodness of him

from whom they have proceeded. The emotions of gratitude are *excited* as well as *expressed* by the offering of praise; and praise is the natural and appropriate expression of joyous feeling. "Is any afflicted, let him pray. Is any merry, let him sing psalms," James v. 13; and, while he is thus employed, he will find it "a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, to show forth his loving kindness in the morning, and his faithfulness every night. Praise ye, then, the Lord; for it is good to sing praises unto our God; it is pleasant, and praise is comely." Psa. xcii. 1, 2; cxlvii. 1.

*In praise, our thoughts are frequently withdrawn from ourselves, and concentrated on the blessed God.*

Not only do we call upon our souls to bless the Lord for the innumerable *benefits* he has conferred, but also for the glorious *perfections* he displays. "We praise the name of the Lord;" that name of indescribable excellence, which, whenever proclaimed or pronounced, should fill us with adoring delight! From the consideration of what he has done, in his works, which are so marvellous and so great, we ascend to the contemplation of what he is in himself. We fix our thoughts on his uncreated and unbounded excellencies. We lose sight of all that is selfish, and of all that is earthly, and of all that has the character of imperfection; and we direct our regard, with admiring and rapturous delight, to the perfections of the blessed God. Our thoughts and

our emotions now take their character from the contemplation of infinite loveliness, the perfection of beauty, the glory of Deity. We rejoice that such a Being there is; that he reigns on the throne of the universe; that he admits us to communion with himself; that he reveals himself as the God of our salvation; that his attributes harmonize in the wondrous scheme of our redemption, and that he encourages our hope of perpetual and consummate happiness in his presence!

*In praise, there is the nearest approach to the pleasures of the heavenly world.*

In heaven there may be scarcely occasion for prayer, for every desire will be gratified as soon as it shall rise in the mind; but heaven is the world of perpetual and extatic praise. All the capacities and affections of the soul are there attuned to praise. The blissful manifestations of the Divine glory call forth, from all the rejoicing hosts, a tribute of most grateful and adoring praise. They refrain not day or night from exclaiming, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty; which was, and is, and is to come." Rev. iv. 8. But of all the inspiring themes of celestial worship, there is not one which calls forth delight so rapturous, or praise so exalted, as the full development and glorious consummation of the work of redeeming love. It is this which is celebrated in that "new song" recorded in the book of the Revelation, in which unite ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying, with a loud voice, "Worthy is

the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." And every creature which is in heaven, was heard to say, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Rev. v. 12, 13.

Let us now proceed to consider,

SECONDLY. The conclusions which these pleasures authorize.

1. We conclude, that they who find no pleasure in prayer or in praise must be destitute of real religion.

The man who lives without prayer lives in the neglect of a known and obvious duty, and in the violation of a direct and often repeated command. The man who lives without the habit of offering praise, betrays a heart awfully insensible and basely ungrateful. The man to whom such engagements are irksome, and who bends his knee in the semblance of worship, only from the force of early education, or the goading of an unquiet conscience, is completely destitute of a spiritual taste. He has no feelings in common with the whole family of God on earth, or with redeemed spirits in heaven. His heart is not right with God; it displays the entire absence of spiritual life; he is dead in trespasses and sins, and, unless a complete change be effected in his temper of mind, it is impossible that he should gain admission to the joys of immortality.

Were I addressing any one chargeable with

the neglect of prayer, I would ask, Can you quit, in the morning, the chamber of repose, and feel no obligation to him who watched over your unguarded hours, and extended over you the shield of his protection? Can you enter on the business of the day, aware of the dangers and temptations to which you are exposed, and feel no inducement to seek an interest in his guardian care? - Can you conclude the day, without any recollection of mercies received, or of sins which require forgiveness; and without any desire to seek the blessings of the great salvation? If you can, your state is inexpressibly awful, and is becoming more and more alarming every day you live. Conscience is asleep. The tempter gains a constant accession of power. What can be done to rouse you to a sense of your guilt and danger? Must some violent and threatening disease be commissioned to excite the fear of death and judgment, in order to bring you, in the attitude of a suppliant, to the throne of mercy? Must some heavy calamity cut off your worldly enjoyments, in order to compel you to seek the favour of him whose mercies you have disregarded, and whose wrath you have provoked? Oh, may you be found, with penitential confessions and contrition, at the throne of grace, ere it be too late, lest soon you should be found, without a plea, before the dread tribunal!

2. We infer, that they who would enjoy these exalted pleasures, must implore the aid of the Spirit of God.



solicitudes, and at the same time put forth, with unabated energy, the aspirations of the heart after the things of the world to come? Can you mingle intimately and habitually with the "men who have their portion in this life," and at the same time retain, in full ardour, the spirit of one whose "citizenship" and whose treasure is in heaven? Do you find no difficulty in so using the things of this world as not to abuse them, never allowing it for one moment to escape your recollection, that "the fashion of this world passeth away?" Have you attained perfect facility in the Divine art of living in the world without being "of the world," and of frequenting its busiest scenes, without imbibing its spirit or being conformed to its practices? Are your religious feelings as lively, throughout the course of an entire week, as on its first and hallowed day; or have you not been often and painfully reminded, by more than incipient declension, of the importance of that day which urges and which aids you to "strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die?" Rev. iii. 2. Have you not, again and again presented your grateful acknowledgments to the Lord of the Sabbath, for an institution so admirably adapted to the exigencies of your condition? Have you not oftentimes rejoiced in spirit, when your eyes have opened to the rays of the Sabbath's sun, and your heart has echoed to such strains as these:

“ Another six days’ work is done,  
 Another Sabbath is begun :  
 Return, my soul, enjoy thy rest,  
 Improve the day thy God has bless’d.

In holy duties, let the day,  
 In holy pleasures pass away :  
 How sweet a Sabbath thus to spend,  
 In hope of one which ne’er shall end !”

2. The Sabbath invites us to a pleasurable contemplation of those grand events, which it is the design of the day to commemorate.

The reason assigned for the original institution of the Sabbath is in these words: “ In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.” Exod. xx. 11. Do you wonder that the Sabbath should have been appointed, in special commemoration of a work so stupendous and so glorious? Think of the *power* of him whose will to create effected the work of creation; who out of non-existing materials produced the globe which we inhabit, and the globes by which we are surrounded; who “spake, and it was done, who commanded, and it stood fast.” Psa. xxxiii. 9. Think of the *goodness* of Him whose “tender mercies are over all his works,” Psa. cxlv. 9; and say, whether such transcendent and exuberant goodness in alliance with such power, demand not a frequent and a grateful commemoration! Say, whether a day appropriated to this express purpose, should

not be, on its every return, welcome and pleasurable? Should it not be our delight thus to acknowledge, that the world in which we dwell is *his* world, that we ourselves are not so much our own as *his*, and that the services which on this day He justly claims, it is our high delight to render? Should there not be ever springing up within us a feeling in full accordance with the emotions of him, who called upon all nature to become vocal in Jehovah's praise? "Praise ye him, all his angels; praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon; praise him all ye stars of light. Let them praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded, and they were created. Let them praise the name of the Lord; for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven!" Psa. cxlviii. 2, 3, 5, 13.

But there has been achieved a work of still greater magnitude and still greater glory, than even that which it was the original design of the Sabbath to keep in commemoration. "Behold," saith Jehovah, "I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy." Isa. lxv. 17, 18. The renewal and recovery of a world of immaterial and immortal souls is a work still more glorious in its nature, and far more momentous, and joyous, and permanent in its results, than the creation of the material universe. At the first

erection of the fair and beauteous fabric of nature, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Job xxxviii. 7. With exulting and adoring delight, they behold the heavens displaying the glory of their Lord, and the firmament showing forth the work of his hands. Ever since has it been their pleasurable employ to contemplate the works and ways of Him, whose they are and whom they serve. With their intellectual energies, and their unbounded field of contemplation, and their nearness of access to the uncreated source of wisdom, how splendid and how bliss-inspiring must have been, even at an early period of their existence, their attainments in knowledge! But "now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places is to be made known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." Eph. iii. 10. Be astonished, O ye heavens; wonder, O earth; He who formed our world came and dwelt in it; he who created man, himself became man; he who breathed into man the breath of life, himself expired in the agonies of death; he who, when standing on the side of the tomb, said, with commanding and life-giving energy, to him who had been dead four days, "Come forth!" was himself laid in the sepulchre. But in the sepulchre he could not be long detained. In full triumph over death, and him that had the power of death, he rose on the morning of the first day of the week, thus giving full evidence that his atoning sacrifice was accepted by God the

and betray the wanderings of their minds; exhibiting, but too plainly, that they have only the attitude and not the emotions of worshippers. In our songs of praise, how many remain habitually silent; how many even of those who are not destitute either of an ear or a voice for harmony! Surely, if in devotional engagements they felt an adequate interest, and enjoyed a high delight, there would not be occasion for such remarks as these. Let us then cherish, with increasing assiduity and delight, the habits of pure and spiritual devotion. Let us regard the pleasures of prayer and of praise as among the richest elements of happiness; and let the emotions of our hearts correspond with the impassioned language of the psalmist, when in the wilderness of Judah, "O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee—to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips." Psa. lxxiii. 1—5.

"I'll praise my Maker with my breath;  
And when my voice expires in death,  
Praise shall employ my nobler powers:  
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,  
While life, and thought, and being last,  
Or immortality endures!"

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE PLEASURES OF THE SABBATH.

THERE are two aspects under which we may contemplate the observance of the Sabbath. It may be regarded in the light of a most imperative duty, and it may be regarded in the light of a most exalted privilege. The duty of keeping holy one day in seven, as the Sabbath of the Lord, is sufficiently apparent from the fourth commandment of that law, which is of perpetual obligation; and the duty of observing the first day of the week, as the Christian Sabbath, is sufficiently apparent from the example of the apostles themselves, and of the churches organized and regulated by their instructions. Presuming then that no doubt dwells upon your minds, with regard to the *obligation* of "remembering the Sabbath to keep it holy," my object in the present chapter shall be to exhibit the Sabbath as a day of *sacred delight*.

In attempting to depict the pleasures of the Sabbath, I wish to direct your thoughts to the nature of the pleasures which the Sabbath is designed to afford; and to the habits of mind and of conduct, which the consideration of these pleasures should induce.

Let us inquire,

FIRST, Into the *nature* of the pleasures which the Sabbath is designed to afford.

1. It secures a desirable and welcome suspension of the labours and cares of life.

“Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work; thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.” Exod. xx. 9, 10. Do you not admire the compassionate kindness of Him, whose are “the cattle on a thousand hills,” Psa. l. 10, for introducing into the law of the Sabbath, a precept in favour of the repose and enjoyment even of the brute creation? Surely if they are not below the notice of Him who sways the sceptre, and determines the laws of the universe, their comfort should not be disregarded by man, to whom they render services of so high a value.

But if the Sabbath extend its advantages even to the inferior creatures, how much greater are the benefits it yields to man. For man the Sabbath was made. Mark ii. 27. To the labouring classes of society, which, in countries like our own, constitute the majority of the population, how desirable and how welcome is the return of the day of rest! Wearied and exhausted by six days' successive toil, the seventh is a day of most acceptable and grateful repose. Nor is it only when the day returns, that the sabbatic institution becomes a source of relief; for refreshing, in no slight degree, throughout the week

of labour, is the anticipation of the day of rest.

If this suspension of the labours and the cares of life be beneficial to the *body*, still more advantageous is it to the interests of the *soul*. Were it not for this periodical cessation of the business of this world, almost impracticable should we find it to fix the attention of those around us on the concerns of the world to come. With what marked disinclination and extreme reluctance do most men part with a single hour of the six days which they consider their own, for any of the high and holy purposes of religion! Our chief hope of directing their regard to the things which belong to their peace, is founded on the opportunities peculiar to the day on which their secular avocations are suspended; so that, were it not for that day of rest, we should be destitute of the grand moral means, most powerfully conducive to the conversion of sinners, and the augmentation of the church of God.

And has the real and established Christian no experience of the value, not to say of the necessity of this suspension of worldly engagements? Does he not prize, beyond expression, the golden hours of the day which the Lord hath blessed? Say, Christian, can you pass through the six days of secular employment, without the slightest diminution of your spirituality of mind? Can you be immersed day after day, in this world's occupations and



Have we not seen, that these sacred engagements involve in them the purest and the most spiritual exercises of the mind and heart? Have we not seen, that they involve in them adoring contemplations of the blessed God, the expression of the highest love to the Author of all our enjoyments, and the exercise of all the holy dispositions he requires? Who, then, without Divine influence, is sufficient for these things? If, without Divine aid, these pleasures of the Christian life could be realized, no necessity would there be, in any instance, for the operation of influence from above. But alas! do we not feel our own incompetency both to the right performance of these duties, and the true enjoyment of these privileges? Convinced then of the necessity of Divine aid, how encouraging is it to find, that Christians are represented by an inspired apostle as "praying in the Holy Ghost," Jude 20; how encouraging to receive the assurance that "the Spirit helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God." Rom. viii. 26, 27. How powerful then is the inducement to pray for the influences of the Holy Spirit, in order that our minds may become spiritual and devotional; susceptible of these Divine pleasures, and filled with these heavenly

joys! Is it not to the absence of fervent desires and petitions for his aid, that we may trace the absence of these elevated joys, of which prayer and praise are designed to be the means? Will not these delights bear an exact proportion to the degree in which we are favoured with the promised influences of the Holy Spirit? and will not these influences be imparted in proportion to the faith, and to the fervour with which they are implored?

3. We conclude, that it is at once our duty and our interest to cultivate a spirit habitually prepared for the enjoyment of devotional pleasures.

Would we "rejoice evermore?" then must we "pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks." 1 Thess. v. 16—18. We cannot, in the strictest sense, be always engaged in acts of devotion; but we are required to cherish those devotional feelings which will habitually predispose for the engagements of prayer and of praise. In this sense we are required to be "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance." Eph. vi. 18. Then no pursuits of business or of pleasure should be permitted to occasion the neglect of prayer, or to exercise over the mind an influence unfavourable to the right discharge of the duty. Then whatever would have a tendency to disqualify our minds for such engagements, must be inimical to our highest interests, and unfriendly to our true enjoyment. Whatever would indispose for

prayer and for praise should be viewed with apprehension and aversion; since that which unfits us for an approach to God, must be displeasing in the sight of God. Let us then avail ourselves of this correct and valuable test, to ascertain what we may safely allow, and what we should carefully avoid; ever regarding with dread those employments, those amusements, those connexions, and those cares, which have a tendency to withdraw us from our God, and to intercept the light of his favour.

4. We conclude that our stated opportunities of devotion, whether retired or social, should be welcomed and improved as occasions of high enjoyment.

Who can fully appreciate the privilege of a personal audience of Deity when withdrawn from every human eye? How can we sufficiently prize our daily opportunities of drawing near to God, and pouring out our hearts before him, in the persuasion that his eye is as much upon us, and his ear as attentively open to our prayer, as though we were the only suppliants at his throne? Let each of us then daily, and at least in the commencement and the close of every day, retire to converse with the Father of our spirits, who seeth in secret, and who can make the hour of retired devotion the season of exquisite enjoyment.

Nor let us think lightly of the duty or the pleasure of *family* devotion. How can we expect domestic happiness without domestic

worship? How can it be expected that the blessing of God should rest upon the habitation where no altar is erected to his honour? How can the members of the family be expected to discharge their duties to each other, if they be unmindful of the paramount duty of rendering homage to God? On the contrary, how much of beauty, how much of harmony, how much of blessedness is there, in the united supplications of a family, where the blessing of God is implored on all the relations, on all the engagements, and on all the enjoyments of life! Inexpressibly pleasurable is it to utter and to hear "the voice of rejoicing and salvation in the tabernacles of the righteous." Psa. cxviii. 15.

Let it also be ever impressed upon our minds, that *the house of God* is the house of *Prayer*, that "the Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob," Psa. lxxxvii. 2; and that it becomes us to "enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise." Psa. c. 4. Of the services of the sanctuary, many appear to regard the discourse of the preacher as the leading and most essential part, while they are disposed to consider the engagements of prayer and of praise as only inferior appendages. This is a great and lamentable mistake, proceeding upon an entire misapprehension of the nature and importance of worship. Alas! how many, in our public assemblies, seem almost uninterested in the offering of prayer! Their eyes interpret the character,

Father, and that, by the blood of his cross, he had obtained eternal redemption for us." Heb. ix. 12. Well might the first day of the week receive, from that most glorious of events, a new and appropriate designation; well might "the Lord's day" be elevated to the distinction of the Christian Sabbath. "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." Psa. cxviii. 24. This is the day which the primitive Christians, guided by apostolic example, and animated by every grateful and joyous impulse of the heart, consecrated to the honour of their risen and glorified Lord. This is the day on which the Holy Spirit descended, with all his wonder-working powers, on the assembly of the worshipping and expecting disciples. This is the day on which his enlightening, convincing, and renovating influence has in every age been most abundantly enjoyed, when even two or three have agreed together to implore, in the name of the exalted Saviour, this heavenly gift. This is the day on which the work of the new creation has been carried on with the most rapid and most signal advancement. This is the day on which benignant angels, who rejoice in the repentance of a sinner, have had most frequent and abundant occasions of delight and praise. Then, O my Christian friends, let the Sabbath of the Lord, let the day sacred to the honour of the Saviour, be ever to you a day of holy rejoicing. Let it be the utterance of your habitual feelings, when you "call the Sabbath a delight." Isa.

lviii. 13. Let your very first moments, on the morning of this holy day, be moments of pleasurable anticipation and grateful praise; so that with your inmost soul you may be prepared to sing,

“Welcome sweet day of rest,  
That saw the Lord arise;  
Welcome to this reviving breast,  
And these rejoicing eyes.”

3. The Sabbath affords the most valuable opportunities for the pleasures of social worship.

Were it not for the appointment, by Divine authority, of one particular day for the purposes of religious worship, fruitless and abortive would be the attempt to convene, on ordinary occasions, a numerous assembly in the house of God. Conflicting opinions and clashing interests would render it almost impossible to fix, by general agreement, the seasons for public worship. “One man’s business,” to use the words of Dr. Paley, “would perpetually interfere with another man’s devotion; and the buyer would be calling at the shop, when the seller is gone to church.” All this embarrassment and confusion is prevented by the Divine appointment of a Sabbath. Its return invites us to the sanctuary. “We are glad when it is said to us, Let us go into the house of the Lord.—How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!—A day in thy courts is better than a thousand.—One thing have we desired of the Lord, that will we

seek after, that we may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and inquire in his temple. —Our soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; our heart and our flesh crieth out for the living God;—to see thy power and thy glory, so as we have seen thee in the sanctuary.” Psa. cxxii. 1, 2; lxxxiv. 1, 10; xxvii. 4; lxiii. 4. Our pleasurable recollections stimulate our desires, and encourage our expectations. It was there, perhaps, we first tasted of true delight by tasting “that the Lord is gracious.” 1 Pet. ii. 3. It was there that we felt the first susceptibilities of heavenly pleasure, and made the first approaches to the fountain of blessedness. It was there we felt the first relentings of a broken heart, and offered the first sacrifice of a contrite spirit. It was there we enjoyed the first manifestations of a reconciling God, and first embraced the overtures of a beseeching Saviour. It was there the hope of forgiveness first cheered our desponding minds, and the hope of glory first dawned upon our rejoicing spirits! Or, if that eventful period of our history, when we trust we passed over from the region of death to the region of life, be involved in some obscurity, so that we cannot determine when or where we first experienced the power of the vivifying Spirit, still we are deeply aware that the advantages and the pleasures we have realized in the sanctuary surpass our power of expression. To read and study the volume of inspi-

ration is our habitual solace in the hour of retired devotion; but those very truths which we *read*, not without impression, and not without delight, in the solitude of the closet, we *hear*, with still deeper impression, and still more vivid delight, in the social worship of the sanctuary. Nor is it difficult to assign the reasons for this augmentation of pleasurable feeling: it is to be traced not only to the sympathies of our nature, but also to the express appointment and ordinance of God. We are not strangers to the power of the living voice, even when not gifted by nature or by art with the power of pouring forth the mellifluous and varied tones of a well-tuned instrument. We are not strangers to the power of sympathetic emotion, when heart vibrates with heart, and mind responds to mind, throughout the whole extent of a numerous and attentive auditory. But in the pleasures of which we speak, there are elements of a still sublimer character, and there are excitements of more vital and commanding energy. When thus engaged, we are in attendance on the God of the sanctuary; when thus employed, we are observing an ordinance of heaven; when thus assembled to honour the law of the Sabbath, we are authorized to expect the purest and the highest delight. "For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation:



and her saints shall shout aloud for joy." Psa. cxxxii. 13—16.

I might here expatiate over a wide and interesting field, and invite you to contemplate the sacred pleasures of a direct approach to the throne of grace in the offering of prayer and of praise. But to this source of delight, which it is the glory of the Christian Sabbath so abundantly to yield, I have already directed your regard. I endeavoured to aid your conceptions of the delights which both prayer and praise are alike adapted to yield, as also of the superiority of the pleasures of praise above those of prayer. It is in these exercises of thanksgiving that our attention is directed, not so much to our wants as to our enjoyments; not so much to ourselves as to our God. It is in these sublimest aspirations to heaven that we make the nearest approaches to the joys of pure and of perfected spirits, in that world of perpetual sabbath, where no sin disturbs the effort of the mind, and no care breaks in upon the serenity of the soul; where no weariness impairs the ardour of its devotions, and no night suspends the delights of its worship! Blissful, beyond all sublunary enjoyments, are even these distant anticipations of the Sabbath which remains for the people of God.

Such being the nature of the pleasures which the Sabbath is designed to afford, let me invite your attention,

SECONDLY, To the habits of mind and of

conduct, which the consideration of these pleasures should induce.

1. Let us habitually regard and represent the Sabbath as a day of sacred pleasure.

In our most secret thoughts, in the bosom of our families, and in the circle of our associates, let us uniformly call the Sabbath a delight. Let us not consider it, and let us not be thought to view it, as a day of privations, but as a day of enjoyments. Let us not regard it, and let us not be thought to regard it, as a day of dulness, marked in our recollections and anticipations by a melancholy blank, but as a day of cheerfulness, enlivened by its own peculiar pleasures. Let not the aspect of seriousness degenerate into repulsive austerity, or forbid the hope of the lighting up of the countenance by the smile of benignity. Let not the "sunshine of the soul" be on that joyous day obscured by a darksome cloud; nor let it be possible for any to imagine, that the Sabbath is hallowed by a sense of duty, without being welcomed as a day of gladness.

But there may be amongst us one, and more than one, saying in his heart, as the Sabbath hours pass heavily away, "Oh what a weariness is this day! oh, when will the Sabbath be over!" It is possible that this may be the complaint of some young person feeling this day the unwelcome restraint of parental authority. Are you then, my young friend; really prepared to neglect the Sabbath, to violate the Sabbath, to profane the Sabbath? One moment pause, one moment reflect. Your

situation is most-critical and perilous. If, in defiance of the remonstrances of conscience and the restraints of early education, you break down the barriers erected by the institution of the Sabbath, you rush with fearful impetuosity towards the abyss of ruin. Believe me, there have been many who, with unutterable anguish of remorse, have traced their evil associations, their evil courses, their ruinous habits, and their eventual destruction, to the neglect of the Sabbath. If, then, you value your soul, value your Sabbaths. If you are in pursuit of solid and satisfying pleasures, disregard not the pleasures of the Sabbath. If you desire admission to the joys of paradise, learn to "call the Sabbath a delight." If you can find no enjoyment in the Sabbath, it is because you have no delight in God. If you have no delight in God, you could find no happiness in heaven. If you are found disqualified for heaven's felicities, and disaffected to heaven's Lord, you must be inevitably "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." 2 Thess. i. 9, 10. Seek then forgiveness from the Lord of the Sabbath, of the guilt contracted by the misimprovement of Sabbaths that are past; and, instead of cherishing purposes of future profanation, may you learn henceforth to "call the Sabbath a delight; the holy of the Lord, honourable." Isa. lviii. 13.

2. If we call the Sabbath a delight, let us seek an augmentation of its pleasures, by seeking an increased communication of heavenly influence.

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,” said the beloved disciple, Rev. i. 10; and it is not an assertion peculiar to an inspired apostle. It has been reiterated by thousands of the people of God in every succeeding age. Should it not then be our desire to be able, in the retrospect of every Sabbath, to say, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day?” On the day before the Sabbath, the Israelites in the wilderness received from heaven a double supply of their bodily wants; and on the Sabbath day, Christians have often received more than a double supply for their spiritual wants, in the abundant communication of Divine influences, in the “supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” Phil. i. 19. If on the Lord’s day we are encouraged to expect the joys of salvation, how powerful is the inducement to implore the aid of Him whose appropriate designation is “The Comforter!” With the utmost facility can he fill our expecting spirits with “all joy and peace in believing.” Rom. xv. 13. He can make us “joyful in the house of prayer,” and enable us with joy to “draw water out of the wells of salvation.” Isa. xii. 3. Oh, my brethren, how delightful would be our Sabbath hours, were we to render greater honour to the Spirit of light and life! Let us desire and implore his aid, with the intensest ardour of solicitude; let us exercise

a firm and unwavering reliance on the glorious promise, that God our heavenly Father will grant his Holy Spirit to them that ask him: then shall his sacred unction descend as the rain, and distil as the dew, and in its beneficial and reviving effects be as the showers upon the mown grass.

3. Let us refrain from every thing which would obstruct our full enjoyment of the pleasures of the Sabbath.

With the man who desires to hallow and to enjoy the Sabbath, the question will not be, What approaches can I lawfully make on this day to the enjoyments and occupations of other days? but the question will rather be, What methods can I adopt to secure, on this day, the high advantages and holy pleasures which it is designed to convey? To this inquiry the word of God renders a full and explicit reply; "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath" (from thy customary walks) "from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight; the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord." Isa. lviii. 13, 14.

(1.) On this day we are to refrain from worldly occupations and transactions.

The labour of the workman is to be suspended: the traffick of the buyer and of the seller is to cease: accounts are not to be adjusted: letters of business are not to be

written: journeys are not to be undertaken: plans and calculations of secular enterprise are not to occupy the thoughts. The mind, no less than the hands, is to be disengaged from all the incumbrances and entanglements of this world's affairs, that the energies of the intellect and the affections of the heart may be exclusively directed to the things which pertain to the Sabbath, and to the rest which remains for the people of God. Nor, let me add, is the business of the week to be protracted to so late an hour on the night which precedes the Sabbath, as to constitute a plea of fatigue and exhaustion, for the indulgence of prolonged repose on the morning of the Sabbath; or to be the occasion of that drowsiness and listlessness which unfit alike for the performance of its duties, and the enjoyment of its pleasures.

(2.) We are on this day to refrain from worldly pleasures and amusements.

We are "not to find our own pleasure:" we are not to seek any pleasure, which is incompatible with the hallowed delights of the Sabbath. We are not to indulge in the gratifications of sense, thereby degrading the day of the Lord into a day of festivity, and unfitting our minds for spiritual repasts. We are not to seek the gratifications of intellect, or of taste, apart from the peculiar pleasures of the Sabbath; and therefore we are not to devote its sacred hours to the perusal of works of literature, or of science, or of imagination; much less of those abominations of our land,

Sunday newspapers! Scarcely need I add, we are not to seek our pleasure in those recreations and excursions, awfully common as they are among all classes of society, which involve an open breach and flagrant violation of this holy day.

(3.) We are on this day to refrain from indulging in worldly conversation.

We are interdicted from "speaking our own words." In yielding to the impression of the present moment, the human mind may entirely lose the impression of the moment which preceded. A new train of thought may, in an instant, displace that which just before occupied the mind. Thoughts perfectly foreign to the word and the worship of God, and the design of the Sabbath, may be suggested in conversation, on retiring from the sanctuary and returning into the bosom of your family. The incidents of the neighbourhood, or the history of the past week, or the affairs of the country, or subjects the most trivial, may speedily terminate the impression of the most weighty and serious discourse, to which you have been listening while in the house of God. Of this misimprovement of the Sabbath you are in no small danger, even when surrounded only by the members of your own family; but immeasurably is the hazard increased, if your social circle is that day extended, by the visits of friends, whose entertainment you deem it necessary to consult, and over whose topics of conversation

you find it difficult to exert control. Under these circumstances, how can it be expected that the duties of the Sabbath should be spiritually performed, or that its sacred privileges should be gratefully enjoyed?

Such, then, are the evils, against which we must vigilantly guard, if we are sincerely desirous of entering into the true spirit of Sabbath delights; and such is the observance of this holy day for which I plead, not simply on the ground of duty, but also as indispensably necessary to true and hallowed enjoyment. Never shall we, from our own happy experience, call the Sabbath a delight, unless we honour the Lord's day, by "not doing our own ways, nor finding our own pleasure, nor speaking our own words." I know, indeed full well, that to expect all this, is to expect too much, from any one who is not a real Christian; who is not, by the influence of the Spirit of God, spiritual in mind. Without spirituality of mind, he may indeed find some pleasure in the return of this holy day. He may realize in the Sabbath an *indolent* pleasure, by making it, in the lowest sense, a day of rest; or he may value it as a day of *domestic* pleasures, encircled by the objects of his fond attachment: or he may delight in it with a kind of *sentimental* pleasure, arising from the excitement of interesting and eloquent discourses, and the sympathetic emotions of social worship: but in vain shall we expect any man to appropriate the true delights, and



to perform the spiritual duties of the Sabbath, unless he be renewed in mind, and sanctified in heart.

From this subject, then, we derive a test of character. Let us sincerely and honestly apply it to ourselves. Are you conscious of being destitute of the spiritual qualifications requisite to the due observance and true enjoyment of the Sabbath? Then is your character radically defective; then is your state awfully alarming. Your heart must be brought under the influence of other principles, other susceptibilities, and other affections, or you can have no fitness of character for the employments of that world where a perpetual Sabbath remains for the people of God.

In concluding this discourse, let me present to you a portraiture of a happy family, uniting in the holy duties and exquisite delights of the Christian Sabbath. It is sketched by the hand of a master, and is equally correct and beautiful. "Every day," says Mr. Gilpin, "was a day of tranquil satisfaction, in which we had little to wish and much to enjoy; but the Sabbath presented us with peculiar consolations. We saluted every return of that holy day with undissembled joy; cheerfully laying aside all our usual studies and employments, except such as had a manifest tendency either to enlarge our acquaintance with, or to advance our preparation for the kingdom of God. It was a day truly honourable in our eyes, and marked as a season of sacred delights. Its various exercises, whether public

or private, produced an exhilarating effect upon our minds, and never failed to set us some paces nearer the object of our supreme desires. It was a kind of transfiguration-day, shedding a mild glory upon every creature, and enabling us to view the concerns of time in connexion with those of eternity. Through all its happy hours we sat, as on the holy mount, looking backward with gratitude, and forward with confidence; taking sweet counsel together for the advancement of our highest interests, and scarcely considering ourselves as inhabitants of this lower world. The company of even our most intimate friends, on these occasions, would have rendered our intercourse with each other more reserved, and our pleasure proportionably less lively: but, unrestrained by the presence of witnesses, we gave an unlimited indulgence to all our affectionate and devotional feelings. Some interesting passage of Scripture, or some choice piece of divinity, generally furnished the matter of our discourse; and while we endeavoured to obtain a clear and comprehensive view of the subject under consideration, a divine light would sometimes break in upon us, satisfying our doubts, exalting our conceptions, and cheering our hearts. And still, as the scene has become more luminous, we have proceeded, from wonder to wonder; with a degree of delight far surpassing that which experimental philosophers ever felt, on discovering some grand secret in the operations of nature. Through these flowery paths we

have continued to allure each other onward, (first one of us taking the lead, and then another,) refreshing our spirits, and feeding our immortal hopes, amid a thousand glorious appearances, till the new Jerusalem itself has burst upon our eyes, even that 'city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God,' Heb. xi. 10; whose inhabitants are 'the spirits of just men made perfect,' Heb. xii. 23; and from whose holy walls we heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps."

Such pleasures, my beloved friends, may you attain; such Sabbaths may you enjoy; such scenes of pure and hallowed delight may you realize! May your "Sabbath suns go down with a glorious radiance, gilding even the gloomiest object within your view, and giving you the promise of an everlasting day!"

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE PLEASURES ARISING FROM THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

OFTEN are we summoned, by the voice of inspiration, to fix an attentive and admiring eye on the productions of creative power, that we may elevate our conceptions of Him who "spake, and it was done; who commanded, and it stood fast." Psa. xxxiii. 9. But

still oftener are we invited to contemplate another series of Divine operations; in their nature not less amazing; in their magnitude not less stupendous, and in their result presenting to our regard many glorious developments of the character and of the purposes of God, which the works of creation alone could never have unfolded to our view. In the act of *governing*, as well as in the act of *forming* the world, "the works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." Psa. cxxi. 2. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." Psa. cvii. 43. It is to this instructive, this pleasurable employment of the mind and heart, that I now invite your attention. Contemplate,

FIRST, The nature and extent of the operations of Divine Providence.

1. To the Providence of God we are to ascribe the continuance of the course of nature.

It is the opinion of some philosophers, and of some professing to pay homage to revelation, that when God created the world, he established certain laws which he imposed upon all the complicated parts of the system of nature, so as to secure the harmony of its elements, and the regularity of its processes, and the continuance of its productions, without the necessity of sustaining all its energies and directing all its operations by his own perpetual agency. To my mind this supposition appears as irreconcilable with the prin-

ciples of sound philosophy, as it is inconsistent with the representations of the oracles of God. What are we to understand by the laws of nature, but simply the fixed and established modes of Divine operation, securing a uniform succession of causes and effects; a certain and invariable order of antecedents and consequents? Can we then suppose for a single moment, that the *laws* of nature supersede the necessity of the sustaining agency of the *God* of nature; or would not the supposition be altogether at variance with the only correct and intelligible sense in which we can speak of the operation of such laws? By a law of nature, we have a regular succession of seasons. "Summer and winter, seed-time and harvest," return in an order on which we may confidently calculate. This is the result of other laws, which regulate the motions and the orbits of the whole planetary system. Now can we conceive, that bodies of magnitude so vast, and of velocities so astonishing, should, age after age, maintain the most un-deviating regularity, and the most perfect harmony of movement, without the sustaining and controlling agency of Him by whose hand they were produced, and by whose power they were originally propelled? It is one of the laws of nature that every seed committed to the ground should produce its own peculiar fruit. This is the result of other laws, affecting the qualities of the soil, and the whole combination of influences produced by the atmosphere, the sun, the rain, and the

dew. Can we then conceive a grain of wheat, buried below the surface of the ground, to expand, to germinate, to spring up, to grow to maturity, without any agency on the part of the Author of nature? Is the process sufficiently explained and accounted for, by a specification of some of the laws which govern the vegetable creation? Is it possible that productive energies should reside in inert and inanimate matter, except by the ever operating agency of Him, "who worketh all in all?" 1 Cor. xii. 6. It is one of the laws of nature, that animals of every species should be guided by certain instincts. But can you imagine these to be the result of laws which require not the sustaining and perpetual agency of God? Can you imagine, for example, that the bee collects the honey, and constructs the cell, by the mere operation of a law imposed on particles of matter nearly six thousand years ago? Can you refer to the power of such a law, as to an adequate and sufficient cause, the curious structure and organization of the bee; and having done this, do you feel no difficulty in ascribing to such organization alone, the astonishing instinct displayed in every hive? Or is it not, beyond comparison, more rational and philosophical to ascribe to a Divine agency, never suspended for a single moment, yet operating according to established laws, every instance of organized form, and animal life, and animal instinct? Every new vegetable and every new animal I cannot but regard as a new production of Almighty

power. That power did not cease to operate at the creation; it operates still in every part of the world, and at every instant of time. It does not perpetually operate in the formation of matter which did not exist before; and therefore we do not call it a work of *creation*; but it operates in a thousand modes, every one of which requires the exertion of *Omnipotence*; it operates every moment in the production of new life, in myriads of wondrous gradations; and, in my view, the production of life, with all its energies and susceptibilities, is, in every instance, a work of Omnipotence, not less worthy of our admiration, than even the original creation of matter itself.

These views of the Divine agency, which appear most accordant with the principles and with the spirit of sound philosophy, are supported and inculcated by the express assertions of the word of God. Of Jehovah, even of the Son of God, it is affirmed, that he upholdeth "all things by the word of his power;" and that "by him all things consist;" Heb. i. 3; Col. i. 17. Of him who made the world, and established the laws of nature, it is declared, that he is "not far from every one of us," for that "in him we live, and move, and have our being." Acts xvii. 27, 28. In an ascription of praise to the God of heaven and earth, it is said, "Thou preservest man and beast. These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thy hand, they are filled with

good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth. The glory of the Lord shall endure forever: the Lord shall rejoice in his works." Psalms xxxvi. 6; civ. 27—31.

Could the doctrine for which I plead be exhibited with more explicitness of statement, or greater beauty of illustration? To Him who created the earth and its inhabitants, the inspired writers ascribe the continuance of the course of nature; the preservation of the life and energies of man; the renewal of the face of the earth, by the return of the productive season; the supply of food requisite for the support of the animal tribes; the commencement and the cessation of animated existence. These are represented as the works of God; these, as the works in which Jehovah delights. Is it possible then, without resisting the force of evidence the most conclusive, to withhold assent to the truth, that the omnipotent and omnipresent agency of God pervades the immeasurable regions of universal nature, sustaining all its energies and controlling all its operations?

2. To the providence of God we are to ascribe the regulation of all occurrences and events.

There are two classes of events obviously distinguishable:



To the *first* we may refer *those in which the agency of man is not apparent.*

If to secure an important event, the laws of nature are suspended, the interposition is termed *miraculous*; but interpositions most efficient, most gracious, and most beneficial there may be, without a deviation from established laws. As examples are often the most concise as well as the most impressive illustrations, let me adduce an instance specified, with an appropriate comment, in one of Cowper's letters. When sailing on the ocean in a dark tempestuous night, "a flash of lightning discovered to Captain Cook a vessel which glanced along close by his side, of which, but for the lightning, he must have run foul. How improbable, it might have been thought, that two ships should dash against each other in the midst of the vast Pacific Ocean; and that steering contrary courses, from parts of the world so immensely distant from each other, they should yet move so exactly in a line, as to clash, fill, and go to the bottom, in a sea where all the ships in the world might be so dispersed as that none should see another! Yet this must have happened, but for the interference of a particular providence!"

To a second class of events we may refer *those in which the agency of man is distinctly apparent.*

"The king's heart" (and the assertion is equally applicable to all) "is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth

it whithersoever he will." Prov. xxi. 1. An instructive verification of this is presented by the history of an arrogant Assyrian despot, "I will send him," saith the Almighty, "against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. For he saith, By the strength of my hand, I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood." Isa. x. 6, 7, 13, 15.

This was an instance of wrath: more numerous, in the records of inspiration, are the instances of mercy. Of these, how admirable a specimen is presented in the history of Joseph! It exhibits a concatenation of circumstances and occurrences, apparently contingent, depending on the inclination, the caprice, the memory, the passions of individuals, widely separated from each other in country and in station, yet all unconsciously concurring to accomplish the purposes of mercy, in the elevation of Joseph, and the preservation of the

family of Israel and the nation of Egypt, from the horrors of a destructive famine. The end was to be accomplished, and was actually accomplished by that presiding Providence, which overruled for good the recital of significant dreams, the envy of resentful brothers, their cruel transaction with a caravan of Ishmaelitic merchants then passing within view, the scenes of Potiphar's house, and the eventful and contrasted histories of two Egyptian prisoners! Was there ever witnessed upon earth a development of providential mysteries, exciting deeper interest, or conveying more instruction, than that which burst upon the astonished sons of Jacob, when he who was second only to Pharaoh, thus addressed them: "I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land; and yet there are five years in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God; and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt." Gen. xlv. 4—8.

Such being the *nature* and *extent* of the operations of providence, let us direct our thoughts,

SECONDLY, To the pleasures which the doctrine of Divine providence is designed and calculated to impart.

It delights the heart that is "right with God,"

1. By the assurance that all events shall be ultimately conducive to the Divine glory.

"The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of isles be glad thereof. Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." Psa. cxvii. 1, 2. If the manifestation of these glorious attributes excites emotions of joy upon earth, what must be the delight thence arising to the glorified spirits of heaven! "I heard," said the disciple who was favoured with visions of paradise, "I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty: just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." Rev. xix. 1, 2, 5, 6; xv. 3. Does the fervour of this elevated praise surprise us? Is the language of the song more rapturous and impassioned than the

theme is calculated to inspire? Compare it with another song of the choir of angels and of saints: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast *created* all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." Rev. iv. 11. No one will imagine this ascription of praise to be more glowing and fervid than the exalted theme demands. Are then the operations of God's universal *providence* a less copious or a less glorious theme? Are they not commensurate, in extent of *space*, with the remotest worlds; and commensurate, in extent of *time*, with the whole duration of created things? When, in the view of the blessed spirits encircling Jehovah's throne, the book of his purposes is open, how can they read without adoring admiration, or celebrate, without transports of delight, the history of mercies dispensed, promises fulfilled, mysteries unfolded, and enemies subdued? If such be the feelings of those who dwell above, may not some kindred emotions of joy and exultation pervade the hearts of Christians on earth? Let us rejoice that our world is one of the regions comprehended in the universal agency of Him whose every attribute claims our admiring love, whose every operation demands our adoring praise.

The doctrine of Divine providence delights the heart of the believer in Christ,

2. By the assurance, that all events shall be subservient to the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom.

When no power in earth or heaven was found equal to the mighty attempt, to open the volume of the Divine decrees, or to superintend their execution, behold, He who was slain for us, advances, and takes the book out of the right hand of Him who sits on the throne, breaks open each successive seal, presides over the fulfilment of each irreversible purpose, and receives, as to him most justly due, the united and rapturous acclamations of those who constitute an encompassing cloud of witnesses, and who sing a new song, saying, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Rev. v. 9. Is it not then a thought most delightful to the minds of the redeemed on earth, as well as in heaven, that amid all the changes affecting the nations of this world, and all the events which involve the destinies of empires, the Saviour reigns supreme; that his august title is "King of kings, and Lord of Lords," Rev. xix. 16; and that he will assuredly employ all the power and all the resources of the mediatorial crown, for the salvation of men, the prosperity of his church, and the subversion of the kingdom of the destroyer? While courts and cabinets are intent only on schemes of territorial or of commercial aggrandizement, he is controlling all events, so as to render them subservient to his own purposes of grace and mercy. Why then is it, that *our* favoured country has

attained an eminence so distinguished, and an empire so extensive? Why is it, that her ships have opened an intercourse with all the nations of the earth? Is it not that she may exert a glorious instrumentality, in extending the conquests of the cross, and advancing the kingdom of the Redeemer? And are not the enterprises, the transactions, and the successes of her missionaries opening to us, even already, a source of hallowed joy, and encouraging us to expect, ere long, the dawn of that blest day, when a shout in heaven shall proclaim that—"the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our God, and of his Christ?" Rev. xi. 15.

The doctrine of Divine providence delights the mind of the Christian,

3. By the assurance, that the superintending care of his Father in heaven extends to his personal concerns, and will cause all events to co-operate in the promotion of his welfare.

The view which we have taken of the agency of God in all the productions and all the processes of nature, has a tendency to prepare our minds to conceive aright of that superintendence, which directs our most minute concerns. What occurrence is there too minute, to exert some influence either on the health of our bodies, or the energies of our minds, or the development of our character? And what event, which affects our own disposition or enjoyment, may not produce some impression, or exert some influence on the circumstances or the happiness of others? Is

there, among the tribes of animated existence, a single bird whose life is not by him sustained, whose cessation of being is not by him determined? Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows." Luke xii. 6, 7. If you are reconciled to God by the death of his Son, "all things are yours, whether life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." 1 Cor. iii. 21—23. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Rom. viii. 28. Think, my Christian friends, of any particular event in the history of your past life, whether of a pleasurable or of a painful character. If you insulate that event, and consider it as unconnected with those occurrences by which it was preceded, and those by which it was followed; it would be too much to assert, that it was productive of actual good. But it occurred when the mind was in a certain state of susceptibility, from the influence of prior and existing circumstances, and it therefore produced a desirable impression. It was the occasion of a new state of feeling; and another event then occurred, exactly adapted to act upon the mind, when under the influence of the feeling thus induced. A series of occurrences has been connected with a series of



impressions. These are constituting so many links of the chain which extends from the cradle to the grave. The events and incidents of life take place in a continuity of succession; and are as admirably adjusted to each other, as are the various parts of a complicated and well constructed machine. They are so arranged as to be *co-operating* for the accomplishment of the greatest good. Now can you conceive of any representations or assurances more consolatory than these? We live in a world distinguished by perpetual alternations of joy and of sorrow, of pleasure and of pain. We are subject to changes in the state of our health, in the state of our affairs, and in the state of our endeared connexions. Many of these appear adverse to our happiness; how soothing then, and how delightful is it to be assured, that they are positively for our good! What confidence then should we feel! what gratitude should we cherish! what resignation should we display! what serenity should we enjoy!

But, be it remembered, this happiness belongs to persons of a specified class and character. "All things work together for good to them that love God." Rom. viii. 28. Do *we* love God? Do we love the Saviour? If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, instead of being interested in all this blessedness, he is labouring under a most tremendous curse, and exposed to future and remediless woe! Oh, it is distressing beyond expression, to meet with individuals who, without the

least scrutiny into the state of their own hearts, consider themselves entitled to all that is consolatory in the doctrine of a particular providence, when, alas! it is too evident, that they are living without Christ and without God in the world. I beseech you then to examine yourselves whether you be in the faith, and whether the love of God be shed abroad in your heart, by the Holy Spirit given unto you.

The doctrine of Divine providence is a source of delight to the Christian,

4. By giving him the assurance that it is both his duty and his privilege to divest himself of all anxious care, with regard to future events.

What is there more hostile to the enjoyment of the present life, or more unfriendly to the interests of the life to come, than solicitous and corroding care? How it disquiets the mind, how it impairs the health, how it unfits for the vigorous exercise of thought on things Divine, and for the elevation of the heart to the concerns of the world above! All this being distinctly known to our Father who is in heaven, he has most kindly consulted our happiness, by giving us assurances directly adapted to effect our emancipation from the bondage of care. He has even authorized us to cast all our care upon him, declaring that "he careth for us." 1 Pet. v. 7. He has enjoined us to devolve all our burden upon him, engaging to sustain it. He has encouraged us to dismiss from our minds all perplex-

ing anxiety respecting provision for the present life. The Redeemer of the soul has said, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" Matt. vi. 25. Can you then suppose that he who sustains your life by his perpetual agency will leave you destitute of necessary food? "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." Ver. 32—34. It is not the intention of our Divine Master to forbid *all* thought, or to reprehend *all* care; but he forbids *that* care which would disturb and absorb the mind; *that* care which would disqualify for spiritual duties and spiritual pleasures; *that* care which implies a distrust of the parental providence of God; *that* care which superadds to the labours of to-day the burden of to-morrow's anticipated troubles. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Ver. 34. It is said to have been a proverb among the Arabians, "An affliction is but single to him who only suffers it; but to him who with fear expects it, the affliction is double." "If I am going to sail," said Epictetus, a heathen philosopher, "I choose the best ship and the best pilot, and I wait for the fairest weather that my circumstances and duty will

allow. Prudence and propriety, the principles which the gods have given me for the direction of my conduct, require this of me; but they require no more; and if, notwithstanding, a storm arises, which neither the strength of the vessel, nor the skill of the pilot are likely to withstand, I give myself no trouble about the consequence. All that I had to do is done already. The directors of my conduct never command me to be miserable, to be anxious, desponding or afraid." Could a pagan say this, and shall not we, my brethren, be prepared to say it, on better principles, and with firmer confidence? Then let us be anxiously "careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let our requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Phil. iv. 6, 7.

We have thus attempted an inquiry into the *nature and extent of the doctrine of Divine providence, and into the pleasures which it is calculated to impart*. But let us not satisfy ourselves with the mere contemplation of these pleasures; be it our concern to realize them as our own. Let a personal and practical application of the glorious doctrine be the concern of every day, of every hour. Let the doctrine which is so worthy of God, and so cheering to the hearts of his servants, be, this very day, the corrector and the cure of anxious care. Rejoice, Christians, and exult

in the thought, that all the circumstances of your future life are already arranged, with all the wisdom, and with all the kindness of paternal love, consulting your truest and your highest interests. And is there, in the approaching termination of your life on earth, any cause of alarm or dismay? It is he "who loved you, and gave himself for you," that says, "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of the invisible world and of death." Rev. .i. 17, 18. Entrust then your immortal spirit, commit your earthly frame, to his secure and faithful custody; and say, in all the confidence of faith, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." 2 Tim. i. 12.

And when that day arrives "for which all other days were made," what joyous developments will it produce! If light has already sprung up out of the darkness of many a mysterious dispensation; what will be the discoveries of the world in which there shall be no darkness at all? In the prospect of that light and glory, rejoice even now in the thought that "Jehovah reigneth," and in the assurance that although "clouds and darkness are round about him, justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne." Psa. xcvi. 2.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE PLEASURES OF HOPE.

No subject connected with the feelings of the human mind has supplied more ample or more interesting materials of thought, either to the philosopher or the poet, than HOPE; yet it requires neither the aid of philosophy to explain its nature, nor the art of poetry to describe its pleasures. Its joys we have all tasted; its value we can all attest. It has soothed our sorrows; it has awakened our energies; it has animated our exertions. We were not strangers to its influence even in that early period of our life, when our desires and expectations seldom extended beyond a few days or a few hours. Its aspirings and its anticipations have at length disdained the utmost limits of earthly existence and earthly computations; and we are taught to yield ourselves to the pleasures of a hope which looks and aims "not at things which are seen, but at things which are not seen;" because "the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." 2 Cor. iv. 18.

Let me invite your attention,

I. To the characteristics of the pleasures arising from the hope of immortality.

That they are at once the most exquisite and the most solid of all the pleasures which

can be enjoyed on earth, will appear, if you consider,

1. The grandeur of the object set before us in the hope of the gospel.

This, according to the emphatic announcement of the oracles of truth, is *salvation*; it is *glory*: it is the union of the one with the other; it is, "salvation by Christ Jesus, with eternal glory." 2 Tim. ii. 10. It is a crown of glory that fadeth not away: it is a crown connected with an inheritance worthy of the children and heirs of Him who can multiply worlds at pleasure.

In that inheritance *there will be a perfect adaptation to impart delight*. All which could disturb or annoy shall be excluded. There shall be no curse, no sin, no tempter, no fear, no sorrow, no pain, no night, no death! All which can conduce to happiness shall be enjoyed. The place prepared for the residence of the redeemed, shall be more than paradise regained. Its society shall be the pure, the wise, the benignant. To "the spirits of just men made perfect," shall be added the society of spirits that never sinned, even "an innumerable company of angels." Heb. xii. 22, 23. And this shall be only a subordinate source of heaven's felicity; for "behold, the tabernacle of God shall be with men; and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." Rev. xxi. 3.

In that world *there shall be a perfect fitness of character for the enjoyment of*

*delight.* When they see, as he is, Him, whom now, unseen, they love, they shall be like him; they shall be holy as he is holy. There shall be heaven and glory and perfection within, as well as heaven and perfection and glory around them. The elements of their character shall be light, and life, and love. The image of God shall be gloriously resplendent in every redeemed spirit, and every redeemed spirit shall animate a glorified body, bearing resemblance to the transcendent glory of Him who sitteth on the throne. We are looking then "for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;"—"who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Tit. ii. 13; Phil. iii. 21. If, then, such be the prospect of futurity, well may the apostle invite us to be ever "rejoicing in hope," Rom. xii. 12, rejoicing "in hope of the glory of God." Rom. v. 2. When hope anticipates an object of supreme desire, and of surpassing value; when that object is well defined, and rendered vividly apparent to the eye of the mind; when it is seen to be not more desirable than it is attainable; then hope rises into joy, and joy into exultation! Consider,

2. The solidity of the foundation on which this hope is built.

Hope has been often eulogized for the pleasures it affords, even in its delusive visions of



imaginary bliss, and its flattering expectations of joys never to be realized. "Hope," says a philosophical writer of no mean name, "is our flatterer and comforter in boyhood, and our flatterer and comforter in years which need still more to be flattered and comforted; and while we laugh in advanced age at the easy confidence of our youth, in wishes which seem incapable of deceiving us now, we are still, as to other objects of desire, the same credulous confiding beings whom it was then so easy to make happy. On the bed of sickness, how ready is the victim of disease to form those flattering presages which others cannot form, and to form plans of many future years, perhaps in that very hour which is to be the last hour of earthly existence." In all this we see, according to this writer, "the omnipotence of the principle of hope, and the benevolence of Him who has fixed that principle in our minds." Such is *not* the hope which it is my object to exhibit to your regard, and to urge you to attain. I would not be the advocate of a hope visionary and delusive, inspiriting for a moment the child of sorrow, but vanishing, to his confusion, at the instant when its promises should be realized. On the contrary, the hope which is set before us in the gospel, is a hope which will never make us ashamed. Of this you may be firmly convinced, if you take into view these two considerations:

(1.) It is founded on the testimony of the God of truth.

“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” Heb. xi. 3. Through faith, we have a confident persuasion that there is a world of supreme felicity, which God has prepared for them that love him. “It is true,” may the Christian say, “I have no intimation of that world by the medium of my senses. I cannot demonstrate its existence by any principles of reason; but I have evidence which ought to be, and which is as satisfactory to my mind as though, like the apostle of the Gentiles, I had been ‘caught up to the third heaven.’ 2 Cor. xii. 2. I ask for no stronger evidence, I desire no stronger evidence, while I continue an inhabitant of earth, than that which is contained in the volume of explicit revelation.” Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel: 2 Tim. i. 10. Eternal life is the promise of God that cannot lie. “In my Father’s house,” said the Lord Jesus, “are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” John xiv. 2. In employing language like this, our blessed Lord seems to say in effect, “I would not have called you to be my disciples, or to suffer in my cause, unless I had in reserve for you a felicity worthy of my character. Had I been even silent on the subject of your prospects for the future, still you would have been authorized to confide in my love and in my power.” If then the very silence of the

Saviour might justly have received a favourable interpretation, how glorious are the hopes which we may securely build on his word of most faithful promise. You rely on the veracity of many a traveller who reports to you the existence and the productions of far distant countries which you have never seen; will you hesitate to rely on the testimony of Him whose appropriate designation is "the faithful and true Witness," who came from heaven to tell us of heavenly things, and who is himself the Proprietor and Ruler of all those immeasurable regions of vitality and glory?

(2.) This hope is founded on the mediation of the Son of God.

It would be idle, it would be delusive, it would be presumptuous for man to entertain the hope of future felicity, were not the hope of the gospel a hope adapted to the sinner. Man is fallen; man is ruined by his iniquity; he is convicted of the most unnatural alienation of heart from the God of love, and the most daring rebellion against his authority; he stands exposed to all the appalling consequences of the sentence of condemnation. Has then the gospel encouragement to present to him, even under circumstances such as these? Assuredly; decidedly. It is even said of the beginning, as well as of the progress of salvation, "We are saved by hope." Rom. viii. 24. The doctrine of the gospel is the doctrine of a reconciled God, of an accepted propitiation, of a beseeching Saviour, of a sanctifying Spirit. Its glad tidings are an-

nounced to the guilty, the vile, and the perishing, that they may be pardoned, renewed, and saved. Were it not for this, the awakened and dismayed sinner might say, "There is no hope. I have loved sin, and after its pleasures I will go; there is for me no hope of a better world, I will therefore make the best of this." But hope, my fellow-sinner, there is. It beams forth from the character of Him who has proclaimed himself "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness, and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." *Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.* It beams forth from the face of Him who "came into the world to save sinners," and "to give his life a ransom for many." *1 Tim. i. 15; Matt. xx. 28.* "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." *Isa. i. 18.* "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." *Isa. lv. 7—9.* "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but

have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." John iii. 16, 17. Are not announcements such as these most joyous and gladdening to the sinner, who trembles under the accusations of conscience, and anticipates, with consternation, the tribunal of an omniscient Judge? Flee then, O sinner, without delay, to the hope set before thee in the gospel; look by faith to that all-sufficient Saviour who is exalted to the right hand of the majesty on high, for the express purpose of dispensing both repentance and remission of sin. Behold him in the attitude of a pleading advocate; and rest assured that "he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Heb. vii. 25. Imagine not that there can be any reluctance to accept his advocacy on your behalf, on the part of God the Father. No, it is my delight to assure you, on his own authority, that the God of heaven is "the God of hope," Rom. xv. 3; and that "he taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy." Psa. cxlvii. 11. Give him then the glory of this excellency of his character. Pay thine homage to his justice and to his holiness, by the penitential acknowledgment of thy transgressions, and pay thine homage to his love and mercy, by confiding in his disposition to forgive, by relying on his promise of pardon, and by yielding thine agitated heart to the full persuasion, that he can

be "just and faithful in forgiving our sins; and in cleansing us from all unrighteousness."

Let me invite your attention,

II. To the considerations by which we should be induced to seek the enjoyment of the pleasures of hope.

Let me be permitted to proceed, first, on the supposition *that you have never yet been seriously engaged in this pursuit.*

You will not perhaps affirm, either that the object of the Christian hope is in its nature uninteresting; or that the foundation on which it is built is entirely destitute of solidity. Is it not then most unnatural, inconsistent, and culpable, to display habitual indifference and unconcern? When you hear of it, ought you not to desire it; and desiring it, to seek it; and seeking it in the way prescribed, to expect it; and expecting it, to be ever, "rejoicing in hope?" Are you prepared to vindicate or to excuse an entire unconcern in reference to the salvation of the soul? Should you even be willing that it should be generally understood that such is your character? Should you have no disinclination to be singled out from the circle in which you move, as an instance of a human being—of a rational and accountable being—dismissing from his mind, without one anxious thought, all solicitude respecting a future world? Are you not aware that you would at the same time be exhibiting to your inexpressible dishonour, an instance of a human being forgetful of the dig-

nity of his nature, and sinking down, by a voluntary degradation, to the level of the brutes that perish? An ancient writer affirms, that hope towards God is the proper characteristic of man; and that he who lives without hope is scarcely deserving of being accounted a man, since he almost places himself in the same rank with creatures devoid of reason. To live without hope is in truth to live without God, to lead the life of an atheist: and if the *practical* atheist be not so *daring* as the *speculative* and avowed denier of Jehovah's attributes and existence, he is at least far more *inconsistent*. Let me then beseech you to regard with the utmost dread, every approach to such inconsistency and to such degradation. Are you not conscious of a feeling which impels you to spurn with indignant detestation, every principle which would abandon you to the wretchedness of living without hope and without God? Do you not feel within you aspirings, which render it impossible for you to be satisfied merely to eat, and drink, and die? Are not your capacities of enjoyment fitted for something higher than merely buying and selling and getting gain? Do you not feel a longing after something nobler and better than this world has ever been able to impart? If this desire is not to be satisfied, better would it have been to have had inferior capacities both of knowledge and of enjoyment. If you are not to hope for more of happiness than hitherto you have attained, you know already too

much, by far too much, for your tranquillity. The idea of futurity, of judgment, of heaven, and of hell, will intrude upon the mind; and if for the present these distant realities speak only in a whisper, what will be the tone and emphasis of their voice in the hour of dissolution?

But you admit, I will suppose, the full force of these representations. You admit the immortality of the soul, and the importance of its salvation. You only defer the consideration of its claims to a more convenient season. You are adjourning from time to time the great inquiry, without fixing the day of investigation. Were you definitely to propose any day yet future, should it even be the very next Sabbath, you would not be able to resist the conviction of the extreme folly of calculating, with confidence, on the arrival of a day, which may not arrive till you are numbered with the dead. Yet without fixing any day, either nearer or more remote, you are deferring the grand concern from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, and even from year to year! Had the question been asked twelve months ago, Will you for a whole year defer the concerns of eternity, and allow fifty-two Sabbaths to pass away unimproved? you would perhaps have been ready to say, God forbid! And yet fifty-two Sabbaths have elapsed, and the decision is yet to be made, and the inquiry is not yet seriously commenced, "What must I do to be saved?" Acts xvi. 30. If then you believe you have



a never-dying soul, which ere the arrival of to-morrow may be supremely and unalterably happy or miserable; flee, this very hour, to lay hold on the hope set before you. Remember, "now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation!" 2 Cor. vi. 2. If you allow this day to pass away without repairing, as an humble suppliant, to the throne of grace, for mercy through Him who died for sinners, I need not the gift of prophecy to foretell, that to-morrow the feeling of concern for eternity will be still feebler than to-day, and that the very subsiding of present impressions will leave your hearts still less susceptible than before!

But in urging the inducements to seek the pleasures of hope, I will now address myself to another class of my readers; and it shall be on the supposition that they are *not strangers to these pleasures*. To such I would say,

1. Seek them for the sake of the refined and-exquisite delight which they afford.

In all the diversified pursuits of happiness on which you may have entered, at any period of your past history, have you tasted of delight more pure or more blissful, than when rejoicing in hope of the glory of God? Have not the very conceptions of that felicity, guided by the light, and governed by the principles of Divine revelation, infused into your inmost soul a spirit of gladness? Why then is it, that joys such as these have not been more ardently desired, and more grate-

fully cherished? Why is it that, with such boundless sources of delight, your joy has not been more abundant, more constant, and more full of glory? Why is it that the discovery and the attainment of pleasures of such a character, have not urged you, with greater effect, to seek an augmentation of delight? Have you already in possession, a joy in any degree commensurate with the grandeur of the hope set before you, with the promises which authorize you to appropriate it as your own, or with your actual nearness of approach to the scene of full enjoyment? If not, cultivate more diligently the pleasures of the Christian hope. Direct your contemplations more frequently and more steadily to the glory of the upper world. Permit not to be circumscribed within the narrow limits of things seen and temporal, those energies of a heaven-born spirit, which should be perpetually expatiating among the realities of a world, for a short time to us invisible. If in the enjoyment of that glory you have the prospect of spending an eternity of blessedness, surely you should pass the time of your sojourning on earth "rejoicing in hope."

2. Seek these pleasures under a conviction of duty as well as of privilege.

Art thou not required, my Christian friend, to "delight thyself in the Lord?" Psa. xxxvii.

4. Hast thou not learned to say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee:—thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion

for ever? Psa. lxxiii. 25, 26. To these sentiments thou wilt give utterance, with the most lively and the most grateful feelings of the heart, when with joy thou drawest water out of the wells of salvation. Dost thou not glorify him best, when most thou dost enjoy the blessedness he imparts? Does he not require thee to glorify him as thy chief good? If then it be the deep and full conviction of thy soul, that he is himself the fountain of felicity, wilt thou not daily repair to that pure and most abundant source of true enjoyment? Is it not one of the precepts intended for the regulation of thy mind and heart, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice?" Phil. iv. 4.

3. Seek these pleasures under a persuasion of the salutary influence they will exert.

The pleasures of the Christian hope exert *a purifying influence* over the character. From one who is heir to a title and a fortune, and especially from one who is heir apparent to a crown, we expect the display of a certain dignity of mind, and of a demeanour worthy of his birth and expectations; we expect a certain elevation and generosity of spirit, which would be indignant at every thing mean, or sordid, or contracted. And is it not natural and reasonable to cherish correspondent expectations, in reference to those who are constituted heirs of heaven, and who are anticipating glory, honour, and immortality? He who has this hope will purify himself even as Christ is pure, and as heaven is pure.

The hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, induces a disgust and contempt for that which is defiled and polluted. A hope of an inheritance that fadeth not away, disposes the mind to reject, as vain and trivial, the things which perish with the using, or which are destined to perish in the flames which will consume this transient world. Thus it is that earth loses its power of fascination, while heaven acquires an influence of attractive force; thus it is, that earth is more and more divested of its power to dazzle and its power to tempt, while heaven is contemplated under an aspect of perpetually increasing glory.

These pleasures exert also *a sustaining and animating influence under all the vicissitudes of life.* If the sun of prosperity shine, hope gilds every scene of delight with a purer and a brighter radiance; and if the clouds of adversity gather around, hope, with its beams of glory, can pierce the thickest gloom. Where is the man who, if he need not to-day, may not require to-morrow the soothing influence of consolation, and the cheering power of hope? Now what consolation, under present distress, can be compared with the hope of approaching blessedness? If I suffer pain, what can so effectually cherish the spirit of patient endurance, as the expectation of being soon the inhabitant of a world, from which all pain is eternally excluded? If I suffer from the many privations of poverty, what can so completely reconcile my mind

to the scanty allotment of earthly possessions, as the hope of a treasure in heaven of which I can never be deprived? If exposed to contempt or persecution, what can be so cheering as the prospect of glory and honour, in the presence of Him that sitteth on the throne of heaven? If liable to the assaults of menacing and of formidable foes, what can be more conducive to my security or my courage, than to have "for a helmet the hope of salvation!" 1 Thess. v. 8. Surely then the most enlightened and comprehensive views dictated the conclusion of the apostle, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us," Rom. viii. 18; that even in afflictions the most severe, we should "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Rom. v. 2.

It remains for me to solicit your attention,

III. To the principles by which we should be guided in the pursuit of these pleasures.

1. Let us seek them as the promised communications of the Holy Spirit.

The pleasures of hope are "the fruits of the Spirit;" and are, therefore to be most successfully cultivated, by perseverance in prayer for the Spirit of God. Thus did the apostle seek them for himself and for his converts: "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." Rom. xv. 13. Do you desire to form lofty conceptions of the object of the Christian hope, and to feel a divine ardour growing

and kindling in your soul, at the contemplation of the prize of your high calling? Adopt, then, the apostolic prayer, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." Eph. i. 17, 18: Do you anxiously desire to attain a good hope through grace, that you are constituted heirs of the inheritance which God has provided for them that love him? Implore, then, the testimony of that Spirit who "beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Rom. viii. 16. Is it your desire to obtain some foretaste of that blessedness which is reserved for believers in heaven? Seek, then, with earnestness, the influences of that Spirit, who is "the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." Eph. i. 14. You have often perhaps lamented, with deep concern, the feebleness and fluctuation of your hope of immortality. May you not trace its defects to the want of fervour and importunity in prayer, for the influences of that Spirit which God has absolutely promised to them that ask him? Honour, by your petitions and expectations, that Divine Author of happiness as well as holiness, in the soul of man, and you will not long have to lament the absence of the pleasures of hope.

2. Let us seek these pleasures by the exercise of a vigorous faith.

The connexion between faith and hope is strikingly exhibited in the beginning of the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith, then, is a confident reliance on the testimony of God concerning things invisible; and hope is the expectation of obtaining them. Faith removes from the mind doubt as to their reality, and hope removes doubt as to their attainment. In order to the pleasures of hope, two questions must be satisfactorily answered. Is there undeniable truth in the representations of future glory? and will that glory be ours? Now faith effectually banishes from the mind all uncertainty in reference to the former of these questions. It does even more than this; for it places reliance on the Divine testimony concerning the *way to heaven*, as well as on the testimony concerning heaven itself. The God of salvation has testified that whosoever believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ shall have everlasting life. John iii. 16. The question then, Am I authorized to cherish the Christian hope? is reduced to the simple inquiry, Do I truly believe on the Son of God? If of the possession of this faith I have satisfactory evidence, I am entitled to rejoice in the hope of glory. Let me then firmly embrace the promise of eternal life, given by Him who cannot lie. Let it be my daily delight, as it is my grand security for the con-

tinuance of spiritual enjoyments, to be looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith. Let the eye of my intellectual vision be perpetually directed to an unseen world and an unseen Saviour; that I ever may be prepared to say, "whom having not seen, I love; in whom, though now I see him not, yet believing, I rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." 1 Pet. i. 8.

3. Let us seek the pleasures of hope in connection with the pursuit of holiness.

"Follow peace with all men," said an apostle, "and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God." Heb. xii. 14. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Tit. ii. 11—14. Unless habitually engaged in the cultivation of holiness, we shall be alike destitute both of inclination and of aptitude for the employment of "looking for that blessed hope." If the love of sin be cherished, or even tolerated in our hearts, clouds of awful and portentous gloom will gather and thicken around us, obscuring the prospect of futurity, and intercepting every ray of glory from the world of



blessedness. Be it then ever our solicitous concern to exercise ourselves unto godliness, and to maintain a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards man. 1 Tim. iv. 7; Acts xxiv. 16. Never let it escape our recollection, that the kingdom of God within us, as preparatory to the kingdom of God above, is "*righteousness*," no less than "peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." Rom. xiv. 17.

Finally. With a view to the lively and habitual enjoyment of the pleasures of hope, let us endeavour to accustom ourselves to just and cheerful views of dissolution.

The most formidable impediment to the joys of hope is, with many Christians, the fear of death, by which, in a lamentable degree, they are held in bondage. Alas! how distressing must it be, to live in perpetual fear of that which we know to be unavoidable! How unspeakably desirable is it, to rise superior to the fear of that foe which we must of necessity encounter! And is it too much to expect this attainment? Did not our Lord and Saviour die, that he might destroy death and him that had the power of it, and that he might deliver them who, through fear of death, had all their life-time been subject to bondage? Heb. ii. 14, 15. What cause then has the believer in Jesus for anxiety or trepidation? What is it for a Christian to die, but simply to depart and to be with Jesus, which is far better than, under any circumstances, to remain on earth! What is it but simply the separation of the soul from the

body, in order to a more intimate union with the Saviour! Ought we not to be willing, were it necessary, to suffer a thousand deaths in order to an admission into glory? Shall we then unnecessarily suffer a thousand deaths in fearing one? Let us rather say, with apostolic tranquillity and exultation, "We are persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. viii. 38, 39.

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE PLEASURES OF DOING GOOD.

If there be any one character which secures, from men of every class, the tribute of a voluntary and respectful homage, it is the character of the philanthropist, who devotes his life to the work of doing good. When the ear hears him, then it blesses him; and when the eye sees him, it bears witness to him; the blessing of him who is ready to perish comes upon him, and the disconsolate heart he causes to sing for joy. Such a man is perpetually diffusing happiness around him; can he then be himself a stranger to delight? Costly may be his sacrifices, numerous his privations, and

exhausting his unremitting labours; but while these are opening sources of pleasure to others, are they not deepening and widening the streams of his own enjoyment? Does not every instance of his beneficent agency become a new verification of the emphatic words of the Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive?" Acts xx. 35.

Not unfrequently has a powerful and beneficial impression been produced on the mind of an individual, by a few striking words, expressive of a sentiment of high importance. Such words, although not emanating from the authority of inspiration, have perhaps awakened the energies of a reflective mind, and given a salutary impulse to the efforts of a whole life. The excellent Dr. Cotton Mather, of New England, at an early period of life, read in the speech of a British envoy to the duke of Brandenburg, this sentence; "A capacity to do good, not only gives a title to it, but also makes the doing of it a duty." This single sentence produced an impression on his mind; which gave a character to his subsequent life, and after many years he published an admirable book, entitled, "Essays to do Good," which he designed to be an extended illustration of that memorable sentence. Respecting this very book, a distinguished statesman and philanthropist wrote to the son of the author, in these words: "When I was a boy, I met with a book entitled, Essays to do Good. It gave me such a turn of thinking, as to have an influence on

my conduct through life. For I have always set a greater value on the character of a doer of good, than on any other kind of reputation; and if I have been as you seem to think, a useful citizen, the public owes the advantage of it to that book."

Now if such was the effect, immediately or more remotely, attributable to the words of a British envoy, on the character of these individuals, what may we suppose to have been the effect produced on the susceptible and devoted heart of the great apostle, by these words of the Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Of these memorable words, all the writings of the apostle Paul are one continued illustration; his whole life is an impressive commentary. These words breathe the spirit by which he was actuated, in all his laborious exertions: they exhibit the estimate of happiness by which he was guided, in all the enterprises of his brilliant and glorious career: they furnish a most appropriate motto to the entire history of his mind and character.

That it is *more noble*, that it is more praiseworthy to give than to receive, to communicate benefits than to be the recipients of favours, is an assertion which every one is prepared to admit. Perhaps, however, it may not appear to every one an unquestionable truth, that to give is *more pleasurable* than to receive; or that there is a delight far more exquisite, in the act of communicating than in the act of receiving good. It shall then be my object,

FIRST, To adduce some considerations by which the truth of this sentiment may be evinced. I observe, then,

1. That a disposition to communicate happiness, constitutes a resemblance to the blessed God.

That the adorable Jehovah, the uncreated source of blessedness, is himself supremely happy, and incomparably the most happy of all beings, who can for a moment doubt? Now that blessedness must arise, not only from the possession of boundless resources, but also from a disposition to employ those resources in the communication of happiness on a scale of most magnificent and glorious extent; even to a universe of creatures of various orders and diversified capacities of enjoyment. The correctness of this representation you cannot hesitate to admit, when you consider that, in one word, the blessed God has given us a summary of his character, and that the emphatic word is *love*. "God is love." 1 John iv. 16. Now the obvious meaning of this comprehensive declaration is, that it is the distinguishing characteristic of his nature to take delight in conferring happiness. It is his high and unrivalled prerogative, to give to all, and to receive from none. He is not worshipped by those who form just conceptions of his nature, "as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." Acts xvii. 25. Never was there an ascription of praise more worthy of his name, than that which the inspired psalmist offered in these

words, "Thou art good and doest good—and thy tender mercies are over all thy works." Psa. cxix. 68; cxlv. 9. It is his peculiar glory to be the source of sustenance to a world of dependent beings, who all wait upon him for continued communications of vitality and enjoyment. From the insect which feeds and dwells upon a single leaf, to the angel who wings his way from world to world, whatever may be the gradations of being, there is one invariable system of dependence on Him, whose delight it is to render their existence pleasurable.

But, perhaps, of all the regions of life and of intelligence over which Jehovah reigns supreme, there is not one which displays his benignity, in a manner so stupendous, as the world to which we ourselves belong. Here we behold the most signal manifestation of "the love which passeth knowledge." Eph. iii. 19. On the part of God, there has been displayed the most unwearied goodness, and on the part of man the most determined alienation and enmity: an uninterrupted series of mercies has been requited by unintermitted acts of rebellion. In all the guilt of this ungrateful and unnatural requital, we ourselves, without one single exception, are deeply implicated. And yet to this world of ours, involved in the tremendous consequences of the most awful apostasy, did the blessed God send the Son of his love, as an ambassador of peace. In this revolted province of his empire, did the Lord Jesus Christ appear in the

character of a Mediator, empowered to effect an entire reconciliation, and to accomplish a complete redemption. With this glorious design, he divested himself of all the radiance of Deity, "he took upon him the form of a servant; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Phil. ii. 7, 8. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich." 2 Cor. viii. 9. "Remember then the words of the Lord Jesus, how," in the utterance of a heart of love deeply feeling the sentiment expressed, "he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts xx. 35.

Was not this the sentiment which pervaded and animated the heart of the Friend of sinners, when to five thousand men, ready to faint with hunger, at a distance from their homes, he supplied a full repast, although no miracle would he perform for his own relief, when subject to the cravings of hunger after an abstinence of forty days? Was not this the sentiment by which he was actuated at Jacob's well, when to the woman who seemed but little disposed to grant the only request of Jesus for personal refreshment, recorded in the history of his life, he said, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water?" John iv. 10. Was not this

the sentiment which sustained his heart under his overwhelming agony in the garden, and under the piercing torture of the cross? Was it not from the consideration of the joy set before him, the joy of imparting eternal happiness to myriads ready to perish, that he endured the cross, despising the shame? Is not this the sentiment which he still retains and cherishes on his throne of glory, disposing him to grant the most ample and gracious communication, from his mediatorial fulness, to every member of his mystic body resident on earth, and rendering it still more delightful to his benignant spirit, to pour the full tide of ineffable delight into the hearts of the redeemed above? Admitted to his presence, "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Rev. vii. 16, 17. If then it be the design of God to make a human being happy, and to raise him to the highest happiness of which his nature is capable, he does it by producing a moral resemblance to himself; he renders him capable of taking delight in the *communication* of happiness, by establishing in his heart the reign of love. In order to this he brings the soul under the impression of Divine love. He opens the eyes of the understanding to discern that love; he sheds abroad in the heart a sense of that love; and he directs the heart into the love of himself. Under



this influence of the Spirit of God, we shall be prepared to say, with the apostle John, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.—Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." 1 John iv. 7, 10, 11. Animated by this love, we shall be qualified to act on the generous and elevated principle enforced by our Divine Master, when he said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and do good to them that hate you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Matt. v. 44, 45, 48.

2. A disposition to communicate happiness is a direct source of the most pleasurable feelings.

From the prevalence of selfish feelings proceeds the greater part of human misery. The maxim, whether concealed or avowed, on which the majority of mankind appear to act, is simply this, "Let us obtain from others as many advantages, and return as few, as possible." Now this desire, ever restless, ever insatiable, and often disappointed, must, of necessity, be a scourge and a tormentor to the bosom in which it dwells: and in so far as this desire is developed in social intercourse,

it becomes the occasion of those clashing interests, angry collisions, resentful feuds, and horrid wars which distract and devastate the world. Whatever then eradicates from the heart the feelings of selfishness, and implants the principles of benevolence, must be conducive to enjoyment. Now it has been justly stated to be a law of intelligent nature, from its highest to its lowest gradation, "that we love those to whom we do good even more than those who do good to us. Thus God loves his intelligent creatures incomparably more than they can love him. Thus the Saviour loved mankind far more intensely than his most faithful disciples ever loved him. Thus parents regard their children with a strength of affection, unknown in children towards their parents. Thus friends love those whom they have befriended, more than those who have befriended them. According to this undeniable scheme of things, he who seeks his happiness in doing good, is bound to his fellow-creatures, and to the universe, and will be eternally bound, by far stronger and tenderer ties, than can otherwise exist. Even in this world he will thus multiply enjoyment, in a manner unknown to all others, and in the world to come will, in a progress for ever increasing, find springing up in his bosom, the most pure and exquisite delight."

There is a delight in imparting relief to the necessitous, and succour to the distressed, even should their sufferings constitute their

only claim; how much more if their character be such as to excite our complacency and our confidence? If you would form a vivid conception of the delight of benignant love, when its object is most deserving, attempt to imagine the emotions of that angelic messenger, who was commissioned to descend with rapid flight to the scene of the Redeemer's anguish in Gethsemane, and to strengthen him for the endurance of his agony. With what veneration, with what tenderness, with what assiduity, with what gratitude, with what delight, must he have rendered the best services of an angel excelling in strength! Must not the honour and the happiness thus enjoyed have had the effect of inspiring that seraph with a still warmer attachment to the Redeemer than he could possibly have cherished before, and with a still deeper interest in every part of that wondrous and glorious enterprise which angels delight to contemplate; thus expanding his capacities of delight, and augmenting the blessedness of his eternity? A kindred delight we may suppose to have been tasted by those female disciples of Galilee, who, with attached and devoted hearts, ministered to the Lord Jesus of their substance. Highly favoured were they by their Saviour when he received the offerings of their love; and perhaps it was one part of his generous intention, in being thus indebted to their aid, that they should thus taste of that pure and refined delight which was the aliment of his soul of

love, and that, under circumstances most endearing, they should learn that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

3. A disposition to communicate happiness is peculiarly adapted to the state of the world in which we live.

This is a world of sin, and, by inevitable consequence, a world of sorrow. "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." Job v. 7. We see around us every species of distress, and hear every tone of lamentation. There is no escape from scenes of poverty and calamity, of sickness and dissolution. In order to guard against becoming ourselves the victims of depression and wretchedness, shall we inhumanly endeavour to deaden our sensibilities; or with the apathy of selfish feelings, shall we withdraw as much as possible from sights of woe? On the contrary, shall we not seek relief from the pains of sympathetic emotion, in the active pleasures of beneficence? It is a most morbid symptom of a diseased heart, if its tender susceptibilities are allowed to subside without any energetic efforts to relieve distress. We can have no fitness of character for the world in which we live, unless, by the mitigation of the sorrows of others, our aching hearts obtain relief. Our tenderest sensibilities were designed to give excitement to our most efficient activities, and thus to open a source of happiness even in scenes of sorrow and distress. To these generous impulses let us habitually yield our hearts,

and we shall feel no hesitation in admitting that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

4. A disposition to communicate happiness is connected with God's peculiar blessing.

It is written in his word, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice;" Matt. ix. 13; that is, when the circumstances in which we are placed admit not of both, the latter is to yield to the former, as still more acceptable to the Most High. "To do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Heb. xiii. 16. Now in the performance of any action is it not a source of great delight to know, that it is a service acceptable to Him whose we are, and whom we would ever serve? Does not this constitute a present and an ample reward? And yet there is still in reserve another and a greater. The day is coming, when he who is our gracious Master and our beloved Lord shall appear in his glory, "to render to every man according to his ways." 2 Chron. vi. 30. And in that day, not even the gift of a cup of cold water to a disciple of the Saviour, presented from the impulse of attachment to himself, shall be without acknowledgment or recompense. The very expression of his approbation, and its expression before an assembled world, must be a source of joy ineffable! What tongue can describe, what mind can conceive the emotions of that moment, when to every attached and devoted servant, whatever may have been the scene of his labour,

the amount of his talents, or his estimation in the society of his fellow-mortals, He shall say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" Matt. xxv. 21.

Having thus attempted the illustration of the general sentiment, it remains for me to adduce,

**SECONDLY,** The considerations by which we should be guided in the practical application of the sentiment.

1. We should be deeply solicitous to be actuated by those principles, from which alone there can spring genuine delight, either in giving or in receiving.

If we believe the first principles of the oracles of God, we must be aware, that to be truly blessed is to be the recipients of those blessings which the gospel proclaims; is to "be reconciled to God, to be accepted in the Beloved, to be renewed in the spirit of our mind, and to be created anew unto good works, in which God hath before ordained that we should walk." 2 Cor. v. 20; Eph. i. 6; iv. 23; ii. 10. Unless we have the blessedness of the man, whose transgressions are forgiven through the Saviour's atoning blood, whose heart is purified by the Spirit's regenerating grace, we are not in a capacity to receive aright from the hand of God, or to convey aright to the hands of our fellow-men, any one blessing. No performances can attain the character, or justify the appellation of good works, unless they spring from a

principle which the Searcher of the heart can approve; nor is such a principle to be found in any human mind, unless it has experienced that process of entire renewal, which, according to the language of inspiration, consists in being "born again." John iii. 3. Let then the momentous inquiry be instituted in every heart, Does the history of my moral being record this great event? Has there ever been such a change effected in the habitual feelings of my soul, as to remove those disqualifications for receiving and for giving aright, under which I must once have laboured, and which, unless removed by forgiving mercy and sanctifying grace, must perpetually render defective and unacceptable in the sight of God, my best endeavours to do good? Has my heart deeply felt the influence of the love of Him who died for sinners; and, wandering no longer from the sphere of its attractive power, have I presented my body and my spirit a living, a holy, and an acceptable sacrifice?

2. We should regard it both as our duty and our delight, to do all the good which it is in our power to effect.

I have already adverted to the maxim of incontrovertible truth, that "the very capacity to do good renders its performance a duty." Does not he who gives the capacity confer it for this express purpose, and does he not actually require this at our hands? When he said to Abram, "I will bless thee," did he not authoritatively and graciously add, "And thou shalt be a blessing?" Gen. xii. 2. Are

not all the favours he bestows to be regarded as talents for improvement, as well as sources of enjoyment? and respecting all these talents, has he not said, "Occupy till I come?" Luke xix. 13. Now of these talents there are two, which, in the present state of society, especially qualify for doing good.

The first of these is *property*.

God has been pleased to distribute, in very unequal proportions, the bounties of his providence. Now, the very inequality of this distribution is designed to be, on our part, the basis of an extensive and beneficial system of giving and receiving. What proportion of my income should I appropriate to the purposes of Christian benevolence? is a question which every individual should deliberately ask; and to which an answer should be returned in the full anticipation of the great tribunal. The more ample is the property of any one, *the greater proportion* should he employ in doing good; because the greater proportion he can thus surrender, without injury to himself or to his family. If he whose annual income amounts only to one hundred pounds, gives away a tenth of that amount, he makes a much greater sacrifice, he contributes on a much nobler scale, than he whose income is a thousand pounds, who also gives away a tenth. In the one case, ninety pounds only remain to meet the expenses of a family; in the other case, there remain nine hundred: in the former case, there is a sacrifice of many comforts, if not even of some things usually



classed among the necessaries of life; in the latter, there is a sacrifice only of luxuries.

A second talent, and one of no inferior value, is *time*.

It is the contribution of time, on the part of the few, which gives value to the contributions of property, on the part of the many. In most associations for doing good, it is the assiduity of those who *direct*, which gives efficiency to the donations of those who *subscribe*. It is impossible to estimate at too high a rate, the services of those who devote their time, their thought, and their energies, to the *private* and the *frequent*, as well as to the public and the occasional meetings of societies for doing good. Now as we are not to expect a direct communication from heaven, singling out the individuals who are to direct the affairs of our benevolent institutions, ought we not to deem it our imperative duty, if we have ability and opportunity, to fill some department of personal agency, at a period when every species of beneficent instrumentality may be so successfully employed? Let it never escape our recollection, that it is recorded of Him who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," that he spent his days and his energies, even to extreme exhaustion, in going about doing good.

In our selection of the objects of our benevolence, we should be guided by a discriminating regard to the strength of their claims.

It is freely admitted, that so numerous are the appeals to our benevolent feelings, that to

meet them all as our hearts would dictate, becomes to most of us difficult if not impracticable. It is then of the greatest importance to proceed in our selection, on principles which an enlightened conscience can approve. It appears to me that there are three principles which demand our consideration.

(1.) That which regards the *proximity of the relation* in which we stand to the objects.

I have no objection to the adage, "Charity begins at home;" but let not our charity be always shut up at home. As when a stone is cast into the waters of a tranquil lake, there are seen around the spot to which the impulse was first given a number of concentric circles, expanding as they recede, and becoming more faint as they expand; so may we direct our first and strongest energies to the circles immediately around us, provided we allow the generous impulse which is felt at the very centre of the heart to extend, in due proportion, to the circles which lie beyond. Our families have unquestionably the first claim on our exertions to do good. The needy members of the flock of Christ, and especially of that part of it with which we are ourselves connected, have the next. We are required to "do good unto all men, as we have opportunity, but especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Eph. vi. 10. Of the objects appealing to our aid we should regard,

(2.) The *nature of their wants.*

There are many who cherish a lively sympathy with sufferings strictly corporeal, who discover very little sympathy with sufferings exclusively mental. They can feel for a man who languishes in pain, and sickness, and hunger, but they feel very little for the man who languishes under anxiety, and grief, and depression. This betrays a great defect both of mind and heart, and induces at least a partial incapacity for mitigating the sorrows and advancing the happiness of our fellow-creatures. But is it not a greater defect by far to feel for the sufferings of the present life, whether bodily or mental, and to feel no solicitude that the objects of our benevolence may obtain exemption from the sufferings of the world of woe, and admission to the blessedness which shall never end? Should we give the best proof of compassionate kindness to a prisoner under sentence of death, by sending to his cell food and clothing, or by exerting every energy to obtain for him a pardon? Do we then best display the feelings of genuine benevolence to sinners ready to perish, by endeavouring to rescue them from the present miseries of want, or by directing and urging them to "flee from the wrath to come, to lay hold on eternal life," Matt. iii. 7; 1 Tim. vi. 19; that when the Judge of all shall ascend the dread tribunal, there may be to them no condemnation, but an admission to the glorious liberty and ever-during joys of the "children of the resurrection." Luke xx. 36.

In the selection of our objects we should take into view,

(3.) The *extent of the population* appealing to our benevolence.

The very apostle who was so desirous of conveying ample contributions to the "poor saints at Jerusalem," exulted in the thought that "from Jerusalem," in an extensive circuit embracing a vast population "round about Illyricum, he had fully preached the gospel of Christ." Rom. xv. 19. Was it compatible with his views of Christian expediency, or his emotions of Christian zeal, to restrict his ministry within the limits of Judea, till the majority of its inhabitants should have embraced the doctrine of Jesus? On the contrary, was it not his ardent desire, that the population of Europe, as well as of Asia, should to the uttermost extent of possibility, hear from his lips the proclamation of the glad tidings of great joy, intended for all people? Should not our sympathies, then, be excited by the thought that at this hour, after the lapse of eighteen centuries, darkness the most profound still covers the majority of this world's population, and that the dark parts of the earth are still the habitations of cruelty! Surely then, if we ourselves visit not these regions of night, we should at least send forth able and willing missionaries to "preach among the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ." Eph. iii. 8.

In our endeavours, then, to regulate, by enlightened views, the economy of Christian

benevolence, let all these principles be taken into full consideration. Let us not fix an *exclusive* regard on *the proximity* of the objects appealing to us for aid, nor on *the nature of their wants*, nor on *the extent of their population*; but let all these claims be duly ascertained and compared, that the amount of good effected by our instrumentality, may bear a due proportion to the extent of the means which Divine providence has placed at our disposal. Let us regard ourselves as honoured and indulged; when opportunities are afforded us of doing good. Let us not only embrace such as occur without inquiry; but let us solicitously search out others. Let us, as in the sight of God, frequently inquire, "What good can we effect for our families, our neighbours, our country, our species?" If a generous pagan exclaimed with concern, "My friends, I have lost a day," when the day had been spent without conferring a benefit, what emotions should such a consideration excite in the heart of him who knows the grace, and rejoices in the love; and remembers the words of the Lord Jesus? Let it appear that we feel deeply indebted to any one who lays before us claims, which we ourselves had overlooked; and instead of repelling his application, with the aspect of frigid indifference or querulous disapprobation, let his disinterested kindness be encouraged by perceiving, that in our estimation "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Let it appear that we have tasted the most exquisite and the most refined

delights in the pleasures of doing good; and that these sources of enjoyment are far more conducive to our happiness, than the gratification of the senses, the accumulation of wealth, or the loftiest attainments in knowledge.

Let us rest assured, (to borrow the words of Dr. Cotton Mather,) that, "were a man able to enter daily into all the pleasures of literature and of science, to which the most accomplished make pretensions; were he to entertain himself with all ancient and modern history; and could he feast continually on the curiosities of different branches of learning; all this would not afford the joyous satisfaction which he might find in relieving the distresses of a poor neighbour; nor would it bear any comparison with the heartfelt delight which he might obtain by doing any extensive service to the kingdom of our great Saviour in the world; or by exerting his efforts to redress the miseries under which mankind is generally languishing." Such, amidst all his privations and all his persecutions, was the glowing and rapturous delight of that benevolent apostle, who could say, on a retrospect of his career at Ephesus, "Remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears: yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how, that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus,

how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts xx. 34, 35.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### THE PLEASURES OF THE HEAVENLY STATE.

MANY of the descriptions given us by the inspired writers, of the glory and happiness of heaven, present to our regard an assemblage of metaphors, at once distinguished by beauty and by force, and equally adapted to enchant the imagination and to captivate the heart. On these figurative and symbolical representations, it is no less delightful to dwell in idea, than it is difficult to expatiate in language. They exhibit to our enraptured minds an aspect of boldness and of brilliancy which almost interdicts the efforts of the expositor. We feel that to expand would inevitably be to enfeeble, and that the attempt to elucidate would be, in effect, to darken the bright and beautiful emblems by words without knowledge. Were there then no descriptions of heavenly blessedness except such as are decidedly allegorical, the endeavour to discourse at length on the nature of that felicity would be in itself unwise, and in its result unsuccessful. But, thanks be to "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation," we have, in the sacred vol-

ume, other representations of celestial happiness of a different character, and in a different form. Most interesting and instructive are those occasional intimations of the nature of its enjoyments, which we find interspersed throughout the book of God. These it should be our delight diligently to collect and to compare. They would be found to present to our minds materials of thought more copious by far than our previous anticipations; they would exhibit a richer variety, and a greater amplitude of information than we ever expected to obtain. Our conceptions of heavenly blessedness, instead of being vague and indefinite, would become more distinct and impressive; it would be less difficult and more pleasurable, to fix our minds upon this glorious subject, with the grasp of steadfast contemplation; and we should be brought under the power of additional incentives to seek, with impassioned ardour, glory, honour, and immortality. Let me then invite you to elevate your thoughts to the pleasures of the heavenly state; and may the Spirit of light and life illumine "what in us is dark; what is low, raise and support."

Let me direct your thoughts,

I. To the glory of that world, which is to be the scene of future blessedness.

That it will be admirably adapted to impart delight to those for whose residence it is designed, we may be assured from the representations of the Lord Jesus Christ. "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all



the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom *prepared for you* from the foundation of the world." Matt. xxv. 31—34. The paradise, in which man was originally placed, was admirably adapted to every desire and every capacity of his corporeal constitution. The scenery around him surpassed in beauty every poetic vision of Elysian fields. The ground produced, without the necessity of toil, an abundant supply of food. Innumerable diversities of colours, of odours, of flavours, and of sounds, were fitted to regale every sense, and to render every object conducive to delight. Characteristically different and incomparably superior may we suppose to be the happiness provided in the world above for disembodied spirits of the human race, and for angelic spirits never designed for a dwelling-place of flesh and blood. Vain would be, on our part, the attempt to conceive distinctly of a world adapted to orders of spiritual intelligences, whose modes of perception, and communication, and enjoyment, are perfectly independent of corporeal organs. But the world which is prepared for the future and eternal abode of the redeemed of our race, must be a

world adapted for the blessedness of glorified spirits, inhabiting glorified bodies. When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him; then shall the trumpet sound, and the dead shall be raised, incorruptible, and the living shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality, since flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. It is sown an animal body, it is raised a spiritual body. He who shall appear in his glory shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body. See 1 Cor. xv. All that partakes of the nature of imperfection, incumbrance, and impediment, shall be no more; and the body, now spiritual, shall be so constituted as to facilitate the activities and to heighten the enjoyments of the perfected spirit. How glorious then must be the world fitted to be an appropriate and adequate sphere of pleasurable existence to human beings, now bearing resemblance to angels, and even displaying, in all its unsullied purity, the moral image of their God!

On the Son of God devolved the mighty task both of preparing a world of blessedness for its destined inhabitants, and of preparing the inhabitants for the world of blessedness. Before paradise was lost, before Eden was planted, before the foundation of the world was laid, the wondrous plan of human redemption was formed and matured in the

counsels of heavenly wisdom and heavenly love. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." Eph. i. 3, 4. Blessed be the Son of his love, who undertook the amazing and unrivalled work of rescuing from deserved perdition, a multitude which no man can number of our apostate race, and of preparing for them a world worthy of the resources he possessed, the expectations he excited, the love he displayed, and the sufferings he endured. When about to quit the world which had been the scene of his voluntary sorrows, he said to his disconsolate followers, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John xiv. 2, 3. Who, my reader, can tell by what marvellous and unparalleled process of power, of wisdom, and of love, he is now engaged, in the regions of glory, in carrying forward to completeness that preparation! When I am directed to conceive of a course of preparation on the part of Him, by whom all things were called into existence; "who spake, and it was done; who commanded, and it stood fast," Psa. xxxiii. 9; my mind is overwhelmed with the mingled emotions of astonishment and delight, and with rapturous anticipations would I be looking for that blessed hope, the glo-

rious appearing of the great God, even our Saviour, who shall at length address to the objects of his dying and his reigning love, this invitation, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Matt. xxv. 34.

And will not the blessedness of the kingdom prepared by the Son of God; bear a proportion, to his own transcendent dignity and unparalleled merit, as our Redeemer and our Lord? Had the progenitor of our race retained his integrity, and persevered in obedience, would he not have secured to his latest posterity, in virtue of his federal relation, an inheritance of blessedness? Is it then possible to form too elevated an idea of that happiness which shall be provided for the heirs of salvation, in virtue of their relation to Him who appoints to them a kingdom which is the recompense of his own obedience unto death? When, in reading the magnificent descriptions of the glory of that kingdom, we are almost apt to imagine the picture to be overdrawn; when we are ready to say of the representations of heavenly blessedness, "This seems too much to expect, too good and too great to be realized by any of our race;" when it appears almost presumptuous and unwarrantable to anticipate felicity so rapturous and so glorious; then, let us remember, that it is a happiness procured by the meritorious obedience and sufferings of the incarnate Son of God, and intended to be of such a

character, that in respect of the blessedness as well as of the multitude of the redeemed, "he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." Isaiah liii. 11. What shall we not venture to expect on reading such expressions as these: "The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them—To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne—All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." John xvii. 22; Rev. iii. 21; 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

Let me direct your thoughts,

II. To the blessedness arising from the direct vision and immediate presence of our God and Saviour.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God—Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." Matt. v. 8; Rev. xxi. 3. When Moses received an encouraging assurance of the Divine friendship, he ventured to present to the Almighty this request, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee;—but thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me, and live." Exod. xxxiii. 18—20. It was then only a partial and indistinct manifestation of the Divine glory which this favoured servant of Jehovah was permitted to

behold; and yet we have reason to conclude, that he beheld as much of glory as his bodily frame was prepared to endure; since even the reflection of that splendour from his countenance was too dazzling for the people to behold without a veil. We have also reason to conclude, that as bright a manifestation of Divine glory was granted to his mind, as its capacities were fitted to receive or to sustain; and yet one attribute only of the Divine character appears on this occasion to have been invested with peculiar effulgence, "I will make *all my goodness* pass before thee." Now if even amid the glories of this attractive and endearing attribute of the blessed God, there was still a partial concealment of his majesty, so that his face could not be seen, what will be the blessedness of that vision, when to the enraptured eyes and hearts of the redeemed and glorified, all the splendours of love Divine shall be revealed without an obscuring cloud, without an intervening veil! Then shall they know, by a development peculiar to the world of consummate felicity, the full import of those bliss-inspiring words, "God is love." 1 John iv. 16: Then shall they be able "to comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that they may be filled with all the fulness of God." Eph. iii. 18, 19.

With this display of the goodness of God, will be connected also a glorious manifestation of his holiness. This attribute, which is

justly represented as the glory and beauty of Jehovah, has on some occasions penetrated the hearts even of the people of God, with fear and consternation. When Isaiah beheld in the temple the glory of the Lord, and heard in the responsive song of the seraphim, the reiterated ascription of holiness to Him who filled the sanctuary with the symbols of his presence, he exclaimed with trepidation, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Isa. vi. 5. How blissful then must it be to have a vision of that glorious holiness still more bright, when the feeling of awe will not disturb the serenity of the soul; when, instead of the apprehension arising from the consciousness of guilt, and the shame induced by a sense of pollution, we shall know and feel that we ourselves are holy, even as God is holy; that instead of detecting in us sin, which he abhors, he discerns only the purity which he loves; that he delights in contemplating the image of his own holiness, and takes entire complacency in the character he has formed for his presence and for his praise. Conceive, if you are able, of the joy which every purified spirit will derive from this one thought, "The blessed God will never henceforth look on me without delight; his face will never be obscured by a cloud; his countenance will never be darkened by a frown." And will not the most refulgent manifestations

of Deity be made, through the medium of the Eternal Word, who is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his substance? On the august occasion which the chapter before us describes, will he not come in his glory, and sit enthroned in glory? and will it not be in the exercise of his supreme authority as the King of glory, that he will say to the righteous, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared?" Matt. xxv. 34. And when, in joyous obedience to this invitation of love, they shall accompany their triumphant Lord to the kingdom, and actually enter on the possession of the inheritance, shall his glory suffer diminution? What though he deliver up into the hands of the Father, the Mediatorial kingdom, when its entire design shall have been accomplished; will he not still display the uncreated and unfading glory of the Son of God, and will he not eternally continue to be the adored and beloved Head of the myriads he has redeemed by his precious blood? On this point, so deeply interesting to our hearts, and so vitally connected with our loftiest hopes there rests not the shadow of a doubt. An inspired apostle was directed to add to the vivid description of the day of judgment and of the resurrection, these gladdening words, "And so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thess. iv. 17. This eternal union of the Saviour and the saved, is an object of desire, and will be a source of delight to the Lord Jesus Christ himself; and in the days of his sojourn on



earth, he offered a petition, the acceptance of which secures this crowning felicity of heaven: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory.—I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me, may be in them, and I in them." John xvii. 24, 26. Oh, what must be the blessedness of beholding the unveiled glory of Him, compared with whom the most radiant sons of light, the principalities and powers in heavenly places, are but as the twinkling stars before the orb of day! What must be the blessedness of beholding Him who has redeemed his church from death and hell; who has reconciled to God a world of apostate rebels; who has united in bonds of strictest unity the host of angels and the family of men; who has restored order and harmony to the creation of God! If, in the contemplation of the Redeemer's glory, the minds of angels should attain an elevation above the level of *our* inferior powers, yet our hearts will surely be conscious of ecstatic emotions which angels themselves are not qualified to feel. It was *our nature* which he assumed when he descended from his eternal throne; it was in *our world* that he dwelt when angels ministered to his wants; it was in *our stead* that he drank the cup of sorrow, even to its very dregs; it was in *our cause* that the sword of justice pierced his heart, when the nails of the cross pierced his hands and his feet; it is still

in *our nature* that he displays the effulgence which is the light of heaven, and supersedes the necessity of any other sun! With what feelings then shall we see his face and celebrate his love! If now we love him, although unseen, what will be the ardour of our attachment when we see him as he is! Frigid is our highest fervour, and torpid our most intense excitement of feeling, compared with the emotions of indescribable rapture, with which we shall at that day sing, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Rev. i. 5, 6.

This train of thought directs our views.

III. To the blissful worship of the celestial world.

Heaven is represented, in the book of the Revelation, as a temple, and all its orders of inhabitants as adoring and delightful worshippers. The redeemed of our race are, in reference to this hallowed employment, consecrated priests, whose proper function it will be eternally to present the fragrant incense of praise from the altar of a grateful heart. These acts of holy worship will call forth the noblest exercises of our noblest powers, and the most joyous feelings of our joyous souls. Even with all our present imperfections of state and of character, it is good, it is pleasant to draw near to God; and never is it so pleasurable, as when we are engaged in the offer-

ing of praise. Then have we the most direct and the most ennobling communion with God, when we endeavour to present, by the sacrifice of our lips, the glory due to his name. What then must be the blessedness of worship, when there is no petition to present, no transgression to confess, no sin to disturb, no infirmity to lament, no tempter to molest; when the glorious object of adoration is present to the eye as well as to the mind; when every one of the perfections he unfolds, and every one of the operations he displays, becomes an inspiring theme of most exalted praise! With what inexpressible delight will the multitude of celestial worshippers exclaim, on a survey of his wondrous works, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created!" Rev. iv. 11. With what elevation of mind, and yet with what prostration of spirit, will they enter into the meaning of those words, "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God." Psa. lxii. 11. "How sublime a pleasure will they find in the adoration of that power which stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth; which gave impulse and regulation to the mighty wheels of providence, throughout successive ages; which called into being the new creation; which restrained the outrages of a rebellious and tumultuous world; which chained up malignant and destroying fiends, and preserved,

amid appalling dangers, Christ's little flock!" On such a survey as this, well may they exclaim with enraptured minds, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." Rev. xv. 3. Penetrated with such sentiments, with what entireness of self-dedication will they consecrate themselves to the service of their God, and learn to place their supreme felicity in the spirit of dependence on his all-sufficient fulness! How exquisite must be the delight attendant on such emotions, "when the soul shall have no conception of greater blessedness than that of an ever-living sacrifice always ascending to God in the flame of its ardent and its pure devotion!"

And there is one theme of praise, to which the voices and the harps of heaven are most peculiarly attuned, and which he who sitteth on the throne is most delighted to hear. It was of old the favourite theme of the son of Jesse, and the son of Amos, and of all the prophets, and of all the apostles. It is the theme of redemption by the blood of the Lamb that was slain. Do not our hearts already glow and burn within us, at the thought of being ere long introduced into the number of the ten thousand times ten thousand, who sing with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing!" Rev. v. 12.

Let me invite you to contemplate,

IV. The refined enjoyment of social delight, which shall augment the happiness of the heavenly world.

Of all the elements of future blessedness, there is not one of which we are better prepared to form delightful anticipations, than of that which will arise from the renewal of endearing intercourse with those we love. To a Christian who has no reason to fear the consequences of dissolution, the bitterest ingredient in the cup of which the last enemy causes him to drink, is the thought of separation from the objects of his tender love. What then can be so cheering as the prospect of a speedy reunion, under circumstances incomparably more favourable to delight! In the world which death never invades, Christians, previously attached to each other by the ties of nature or of friendship, will be in each other's estimation even more excellent and more amiable than ever they appeared before; and the pleasures of uninterrupted and most intimate converse will immeasurably transcend all that was enjoyed on earth.

And what an accession will there be to the circle of their associates! Can we possibly be indifferent to the thought of meeting and of conversing with the best and the greatest of men that ever breathed our air, and trod our earth, and obtained a name in the records of inspiration? If, in the language of the Old Testament, for a believer to depart out of life, is to be "gathered to his fathers;" if to be admitted into heaven is to be received to "the

bosom of Abraham;" what must be the delight of enjoying the society of the father of the faithful, of the lawgiver of Israel, of the prophet who ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire, of the man after God's own heart, of the disciple whom Jesus loved, and of a countless multitude of the imitators of God, "of whom the world was not worthy!" Heb. xi. 38.

To these there will be added an innumerable company of angels. Think how they excel in wisdom, in strength, and in benignity. Think of the services they have rendered, by their assiduous ministrations, to ourselves, and to Him who is their Lord and ours. Think what scenes they must have witnessed, in what commissions they must have been employed; what information they must have obtained; what histories they are qualified to unfold! On their memory must be distinctly recorded all events, involving the interests of the church and of the world: they have visited regions of which intelligence never reached our abodes; they must be richly furnished with materials for the history of the universe; while their interpretations of the ways of Providence, it must be equally instructive and delightful to receive!

Let me direct your thoughts,

V. To the pleasures which will be derived, in the heavenly world, from the excitement of the active energies of the soul.

In that world of light and life, our powers of knowledge will be inconceivably invigorated, and delightfully employed. In that

celèstial paradise, "the tree of knowledge shall be without inclosure." There shall be no withholding of the knowledge which it is desirable to attain, nor any seeking of that which is undesirable. The pleasure of acquiring wisdom shall be without the toil, and that maxim shall be eternally reversed, that "the increase of knowledge is the increase of sorrow." Much we shall know, *by immediate perception*, of worlds of which our ideas must on earth remain both defective and erroneous. At present we understand as children and speak as children; but in that world we shall put away all puerilities of intellect: "now, we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now we know in part; but then shall we know even as also we are known." 1 Cor. xiii. 12. Much we shall know *by direct and pleasurable intuition*, without the slow process of reasoning, on subjects which our utmost efforts are here unable to investigate. Much, as we have seen, we shall derive from *the testimony* of glorified saints, and of angelic instructors; and "testimony having then assumed its proper character, will be, in every instance, so perfectly correct and adequate, as to command assent equally with demonstration itself." And shall we not imbibe instruction from the fountain head of knowledge, and receive continued communications from Him "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge?" Col. ii. 3. Will he not feed his followers and lead them to living fountains of waters? Will he not per-

petually impart the purest aliment of an immortal mind? Will he not unfold, as their expanding capacities prepare for the discovery, more and more of the glory of Jehovah, the mystery of his love, the magnificence of his works, and the grandeur of his designs? "Think what must be the instructions of such a Teacher, what the improvement of such disciples!"

But it is not exclusively in the acquisition of knowledge that there shall be called forth in those regions of life, the activities of the soul. For these the widest scope must be given in the world which is described as *the kingdom* of our God and Saviour. In that kingdom is erected the throne of God and of the Lamb; and there his servants serve him. It cannot surely be mere quiescent enjoyment which is provided for those whose dwelling-place is near the throne of the Ruler of the universe, at the very seat of empire, the centre of all activity, as well as of all intelligence. Is not the throne surrounded by angelic ministers, who do his pleasure, "hearkening unto the voice of his word?" Psa. ciii. 20. Are we not to conceive of them as going and returning on commissions to distant regions of the universe, as acting by a delegated authority which it must be honourable to receive, and most glorious to exercise? And have we not encouragement to expect, that in some correspondent services of activity and delight, the glorified saints may themselves be engaged in the state of future blessedness? Who can



tell what extensive schemes of goodness and of wisdom, interesting to various orders of beings, God may have formed, or what means he may employ in their accomplishment? Are not saints and angels fellow-servants; and are not redeemed spirits to expect from their Divine Lord all that can possibly be conducive to their delight? Are they not made *kings*, as well as priests unto God; and does not this convey the idea of delegated authority in connexion with honourable service? "While they reign, they serve!" Read, under this impression, the parable of the talents, Matt. xxv. and you will find these applauding and inviting words addressed to each of the servants by whom the property entrusted had been improved: "Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Ver: 21.

Thus have we attempted, feebly indeed and inadequately, but not without the guidance of inspired truth, to form some conceptions of the pleasures of the heavenly state. But we must not forget to yield our minds to some of those reflections which such a subject should not fail to excite.

1. How adorable is that love which provides so great a felicity for creatures who deserved perdition!

That the angels should be supremely happy, can occasion no surprise, for the angels never sinned; but what in the history of the uni-

verse, can be so surprising; as that *they* should be associates in the blessedness of angels, who might have been doomed to be the companions of devils? Whence springs this great salvation? "It has its origin in love Divine—in love Divine of Him we made our foe." The glory of heaven we owe to Him who vanquished hell, who redeemed us from the tremendous curse by being made a curse for us! Our life we owe to his death, our crown to his cross. Well may the love of Jesus receive commendation from God, and adoration from us, since "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Rom. v. 8. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 John iv. 10. Having then much forgiven, and having much in prospect, let us love much!

2. Let the contemplation of heavenly blessedness much occupy our thoughts.

Christian, art thou not prepared to say, in the language of Howe, "I have found at last where satisfaction may be obtained; and I have only this one thing to do, to bend all my powers to the attainment of the heavenly rest. Happy discovery! Welcome tidings! I now know which way to turn my eyes, and to direct my pursuit. I shall no longer spend myself in dubious toilsome wanderings, in anxious vain inquiry: blessedness is here; I have found, I have found it." Let then thy thoughts, thy solicitude, and thy affections be habitually directed towards that celestial

world, where lies thine inheritance, where reigns thy Saviour. Instead of minding, with supreme regard, the things of earth, look and aim at the things of heaven, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

3. Let us examine ourselves, in order to ascertain whether we have a title to this blessedness, and a fitness for its enjoyments.

“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John iii. 3. Into that world nothing can enter that defileth. “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” Heb. xii. 14. An admission into the kingdom of glory is only granted to those who have been acquitted and approved before the judgment-seat of Christ. When before him shall be gathered all nations, the great question to be decided respecting each of us will be, Have we believed on Jesus to the saving of the soul? Now, as faith works by love, and love is best evinced by actions, a scrutiny will be instituted, and an appeal will be made to every man’s works. To those who have displayed “the work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope,” the King will say, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Matt. xxv. 34. But to those whose lives shall have evinced an entire absence of love to the Lord Jesus, and consequently the entire absence of faith in his righteousness and his atonement, shall those words of appalling and tremendous denunciation be addressed, “Depart from me, ye

cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels—I banish you from the presence which you never loved. I exclude you from the blessedness you never sought. I abandon you to the darkness and the wretchedness from which you have not even attempted to escape. I consign you to those regions of despair, where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.”

Behold, then, the blessing and the curse! You have now to make a choice, on which an eternity is suspended. If you disregard the blessing, or continue to delay the choice, better would it have been for you, if you had never heard of heaven. The thought of felicity for ever lost, will be the most agonizing of self-inflicted torments: I beseech you then, by a consideration of the miseries of hell, the joys of heaven, and the duration of eternity: I beseech you by the mercies of God, by the love of Christ, and by the promise of the regenerating Spirit, that you neglect not the great salvation.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE PLEASURES OF EARLY FIFTY.

“ALL flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field—In the

morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth." Isa. xl. 6; Psa. xc. 6. The day of human life, then, is chiefly to be regarded and valued as introductory to the ever-during existence which succeeds. The question which we should propose, therefore, with supreme solicitude, is not, What will promote our present gratification; but what will be conducive to our future felicity? Were there even strong grounds of apprehension, that joy and gladness could not be reasonably expected in the paths of religion, still if the end be, without doubt, happiness and glory, the brand of folly would be imprinted on the man and on the youth, who should neglect to pursue that end, on account of the discouragements of the way which leads to its attainment. No temporary evils can be so formidable, no transient sacrifices can be so costly, as to justify the abandonment of the pursuit of eternal blessedness. But is it indeed true, that while the end is attractive, the gloom of the way repels? Is it true, that religion diffuses melancholy and excludes delight? Is it true, that habitual preparation for death requires the surrender of all the pleasures of life? Or, may we not confidently assert, and fearlessly undertake to prove the very reverse? Will not the test of experience confirm the declaration of the wisest of men, that the ways of wisdom, "are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace?" Prov. iii. 17. It is on the deep persuasion of this well-established fact, that

the admirable petition proceeds, which appears first to have been presented at the throne of grace by "Moses, the man of God," and which I would now most affectionately recommend to the young: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.—O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." Psa. xc. 12, 14.

There are two propositions, in favour of which I am anxious to obtain, not only the assent of your understandings, but also the full concurrence of your hearts: the first is, that true religion is a source of the highest satisfaction and the purest delight, which it is possible for us to enjoy; the second is, that there are the strongest inducements to seek these pleasures in early life.

FIRST. Let me endeavour to convince you, that true religion is a source of the highest satisfaction and the purest delight, which it is possible for us to enjoy.

The prayer of Moses accords with the prayer of the publican. They both breathe the same spirit; they both implore the same blessing. "O satisfy us early with *thy mercy*;" is the prayer of the one: "God be merciful to me a sinner," is the prayer of the other. The venerated legislator and the despised publican both occupy the same ground; both supplicate the same favour. It is the only ground which we can occupy; it is the greatest blessing we can ask. You, my young friends, cannot be altogether strangers to the

voice of conscience. It has sometimes arraigned you before its tribunal. It has compelled the plea of "Guilty." It has pronounced the sentence of condemnation. It has set in array before you the terrors of the Almighty. It has warned you to flee from the wrath to come. It has whispered that appalling question, "Who knoweth the power of his anger?" Psa. xc. 11. It has added; Who can dwell with the devouring fire? who can dwell with everlasting burnings? Isa. xxxiii. 14. It has prompted the prayer for mercy; and nothing but some hope of mercy could allay your fears. Think then of the mercy which the gospel reveals. Think of the mercy-seat on which has been sprinkled the blood of the sin-atonement sacrifice. Think of the love and grace of Him whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, that he might be just, while at the same time the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus. Rom. iii. 25, 26. Is there not a joy unspeakable in beholding by faith a reconciled God—a suffering, an interceding, and a reigning Saviour? You cannot but be happy, if, with a conscience tranquillized and purified by the blood of Jesus, you can say with the enraptured prophet, "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy" will I "draw

water out of the wells of salvation." Isaiah xii. 1—3.

Your attention was directed, in an early part of this volume, to *the pleasures which arise from the knowledge of Divine truth, and the study of the word of God.* And *what* intellectual delight can be compared with the pleasures conveyed to the mind of the enlightened reader of the Bible, by the histories it records, the discoveries it imparts, and the revelations it conveys; especially by the history of redemption, the discovery of a Saviour, and the revelation of future blessedness! Are not these sacred sources of enjoyment found to be congenial to the taste of the renewed mind, under all possible varieties of feeling and of circumstances; even when every book of human production, the most valuable and the most fascinating not excepted, would lose all power of imparting delight? May every one of you, my young friends, be distinguished by that correct and spiritual taste, which, being daily gratified by this purest aliment of the mind, will prepare you to say, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart!" Jer. xv. 16.

In the progress of these discussions, I endeavoured to describe *the pleasures arising from the exercise of sanctified affections.* Has not the blessed God consulted *our happiness* no less than his own glory, in requiring us to love *Him*, who is infinitely lovely, with all our heart and with all our soul, with all



our mind and with all our strength? Can we be sufficiently thankful, that while he has commanded us to love him, he has granted such a manifestation of his love to us, as is most admirably adapted to inspire the very affection which he claims? "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 John iv. 10. Ought we not then to yield, with grateful delight, to the constraining influence of Divine love? Happy, beyond a doubt, he must be, whose heart is the abode of love to God and love to man; for where love dwells, there dwells the God of love, and it is not too much to say, that "love is heaven, and heaven is love."

I have endeavoured to depict *the pleasures which are to be realized in the path of unreserved obedience to the will of God.* And must it not ever be delightful to cherish the full persuasion, that the God whom we serve is supremely worthy of our most devoted obedience? Is it not pleasurable to feel deeply convinced, that of all his holy injunctions, there is not one unfriendly to our enjoyment? Is there not a joyous satisfaction in avowing, that we are not our own, but "bought with a price," 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20, while we feel that the service which is our highest honour, is also our truest freedom; so that we are prepared to give our thankful attestation to the truth of our Divine Master's assurance, that his yoke is easy and his burden light. Matt xi. 30. May a settled conviction dwell in

every heart, that "his commandments are not grievous," but that in keeping his precepts there is great reward. *Psa. xix. 11.*

It has been my object to exhibit, in their true character, *the pleasures of devotion*, including those which are to be found in the act of pouring forth our desires before God, with all the confidence of filial love, and those also which arise from the emotions of gratitude and the utterance of praise. In connexion with these elevated joys, I directed your thoughts to *the pleasures of the Sabbath*, endeavouring to exhibit the principles on which the pleasures of devotion are heightened, by being enjoyed on that hallowed day, which is sacred to the memory of our risen and adorable Redeemer; and may I not venture to cherish the persuasion, that you are already impelled by a desire of happiness, no less than by a sense of duty, to consecrate to God all the hours of that welcome day, to which he has attached his special benediction?

I have attempted to describe *the pleasures arising from the Scripture doctrine of a paternal and particular providence*. And can it be otherwise than delightful, to have the assurance, that all the events of life, however mysterious, shall be ultimately conducive to the glory of God, the honour of the Redeemer, and the happiness of them that love him? Is it not happiness to know, that if such be our character, we may entirely dismiss from our minds all corroding and disquieting care, and yielding ourselves to the serene influence of

the peace that passeth all understanding, may say with all the confidence of unwavering faith, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory?" Psa. lxxiii. 24.

*To the benevolent and refined delights of doing good*, in this world of sin and sorrow, I have also directed your regard; endeavouring to impress upon your minds those memorable and exciting words of the Lord Jesus, when he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts xx. 35. By him, who himself realized this blessedness in its most exquisite degree, are we thus assured, that it is not only more noble, but that it is also more pleasurable to act the part of the giver, than the part of the receiver of good; so that there is a more refined and elevated delight to be experienced in the communication than in the reception of benefits.

I have made some attempt, however inadequate, to expatiate on *the pleasures of hope*, during our continuance in the present state of existence on earth, and on *the pleasures of unmingled and unalloyed felicity in that world, where the hopes of the Christian will be fully realized, and far surpassed*. It was the object of the last chapter to direct your thoughts to the glory of that world which is to be the scene of future blessedness; to the joys which spring from the direct vision and immediate presence of our God and Saviour; to the blissful worship of the heavenly temple; to the rapturous enjoyments

of social delight in communion with saints and angels; and to the pleasures which will accrue; in that world of life, from the glorious excitement of all the active energies of the soul!

And now let me ask you, my beloved young friends, with what feelings have you read these discussions, and this recapitulation? Are these views of happiness, in your own estimation, correct? Are they not founded on principles derived fairly and obviously from the word of God, and from the experience of those who have received and obeyed its dictates? May not, must not, true delight and real satisfaction spring from every one of the sources to which I have directed your regard? Must not that man unquestionably be happy, who is habitually resorting not to one only of these sources of blessedness, but to them all? Are they not all the pledges and the foretastes of the consummate felicity of that world which is prepared for the very purpose of enjoyment, where he who is the fountain of life and joy will cause his people "to drink of the river of his pleasures," and where the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall lead them to living fountains of waters, and shall wipe away all tears from their eyes? Rev. vii. 17. Will you not then concur with me in the sentiment which I have endeavoured to recommend to your adoption, that *true religion is a source of the highest satisfaction, and the purest delight which it is possible for us to enjoy?* If such be your full persuasion, it will not, I trust, be difficult to convince you,

SECONDLY, That there are the strongest inducements to seek those pleasures in early life.

These inducements arise,

1. From the peculiar susceptibility of pleasurable emotions, which characterizes early life.

That the youthful period of human life is highly favourable to joyous feeling, I may venture to assert, without the necessity of any other proof, than that which at this moment arises before the mind's eye, from your own immediate consciousness, or from your own vivid recollections. You would deem it, I am well aware, most unkind and unwarrantable, to attempt to overspread with gloom this interesting season of life, and, by repressing the feelings of youthful ardour and hilarity, to render that a cheerless blank in existence, on which might be exhibited so many characters of happiness! But what feelings of gladness does early piety repress? Those only whose continuance is momentary, and which induce after them a fearful train of disquietudes and alarms. What gratifications does early piety forbid? Not even the pleasures which are sensitive, provided they be pure and transgress not the limits of moderation; and be assured, my young friends, that it is only when thus restricted that they can be really enjoyed. Does true religion forbid social delights? The very reverse is the fact. It teaches how they may be best secured; it exhibits the principles on which associates

should be selected; the basis on which friendship should be built, the generosity and disinterestedness with which it should be cultivated, and the refined and spiritual pleasures to which it should aspire.

And are there not still higher delights, for the attainment of which youth presents signal facilities? Is there not, at this period of life, a peculiar elasticity of mind, and buoyancy of spirit? Is there not a lively susceptibility of the tender, and the gentle, and the kind affections? Is there not a prevailing liveliness of imagination, combined with a propensity to admire what is new, and what is grand, and what is beautiful, both in the natural and in the moral world? Is there not a longing after something more, and something greater than is actually enjoyed? Is there not an ideal world, which is fairer and more beautiful than that which is external? Is there not a disposition to indulge in bright visions of future and augmented delight? Now all these tendencies *may* prove, in the event, unfavourable and injurious; but why should they not prove beneficial as well as pleasurable? Conceive them to be all engaged on the side of God and our Saviour, of heaven and of eternity; conceive them to be under the commanding and controlling influence of early piety; and do you not then discover in them the very elements of delight, and the sources of high enjoyment? The very sensibilities which, in the absence of Divine grace, would expose to peculiar haz-

ards, when under a holy impulse and a heavenly guidance, will yield abundant and refined gratification. What an appropriateness, then, as well as importance, is there in the petition, "O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!" Psa. xc. 14.

A reference to these youthful feelings we may trace in the reason annexed to that equitable precept, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, *while the evil days come not*, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, *I have no pleasure in them.*" Eccl. xii. 1. Shall the days most decidedly favourable to enjoyment be marked by entire forgetfulness of Him from whom you have derived every faculty of mind, every organ of sense, every capacity of delight, every opportunity of enjoyment? Can you seriously propose to consecrate to the Author of your being, and the giver of your comforts, only the last dregs of life? Shall he to whom all is due receive only the refuse of your time and strength? And are you deliberately of opinion, that such a course can be favourable to the happiness of life? Can you rationally plead for any pleasure which the thought of God would disturb, and in which the recollection of the Most High would alarm? Would you attempt to justify to your own conscience one single amusement, in which the capacity of delight would be paralyzed by the thought of God? If, my young friends, you would pursue that happiness which alone deserves

the name, let all your pleasures be blended with a realizing contemplation of God. Remember him in those characters in which he is most frequently and fully revealed to your regard in his own word of truth; and in which your highest interests require that you should love and honour him. Remember him, especially, as the God of eternal salvation, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, reconciling sinners to himself by means of a glorious atonement; and receiving repentant offenders of every character, and of every age, to the embrace of his paternal love, the guidance of his unerring providence, and the mansions of never-fading blessedness! "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee." Job xxii. 21. Be assured that "his favour is life," and that his "loving-kindness is better than life." Psa. lxiii. 3. Say to him, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance." Psa. cvi. 4, 5.

The inducements to early piety arise,  
 2. From the influence of early life on the subsequent years of earthly existence.

To this influence the language of Scripture particularly directs our thoughts, "O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." Psa. xc. 14. We have already seen, that if early life be desti-



tute of early piety, there must be an entire and a lamentable absence of all those pleasures which that interesting period of life is calculated and designed to secure. But this is not the whole, nor even the greater part of the amount of the loss. It is a destitution, of which the effect is felt through the whole duration of life. It is one of the laws of our nature, that while our susceptibilities of pleasure from the senses are diminished by repetition, the pleasures arising from intellectual energies and moral habits are perpetually on the increase. They grow with our growth, and strengthen with our strength; so that, by constant cultivation, they may become more vigorous and more lively in manhood, than even in youth. Think then of the progress in the path of happiness attainable by the man whose youthful days have been distinguished by genuine religion. What an experimental as well as theoretic acquaintance he may attain with the Scripture of truth, the treasury of sacred delights! What high attainments may be his, in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, for the excellency of which an inspired apostle counted all things but loss! What advances in holiness may dignify and adorn his character, by the constantly purifying influence of that Holy Spirit which God has promised in answer to prayer! What decision and firmness of principle may he be divinely empowered to display, amid all the alluring and seductive influences of

this present evil world! What eminent qualifications may he attain, for various departments of useful exertion, in the service of his Saviour, in the cause of truth, and in the offices of Christian benevolence; illustrating, throughout his whole career, and especially as it approaches its peaceful close, the beauty of that representation, "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Prov. iv. 18.

Now, are not advantages such as these too important and too valuable to be disregarded? You can but faintly conceive, my young friends, of the regrets which many a Christian has carried with him to the grave, on account of having misimproved the golden period of youth, and lost those precious opportunities which were never to return. Who can describe, then, the additional lamentations which have burst from the heart of the Christian in advanced life, if the retrospect of early years brings before his view scenes of youthful folly and of sin, compelling him to exclaim in the presence of an all-seeing God, "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." Job xiii. 26. I beseech you, then, my young friends, to dread the thought of those evil courses, which would render the book of conscience, and the book of God's remembrance, registers of actions and of indulgences which you could never recall to mind, in future life, without a pang, and without a sting!

The inducements to seek the pleasures of early piety, arise,

3. From the connexion of early life with an approaching eternity.

Are you not standing, my young friends, even now, on the very brink of an eternal state? Are there not avenues, leading down to the grave and to the unseen world, from the place you now occupy, as direct as from any place you can ever occupy, throughout the whole progress of life upon earth? There may be by your side a Christian traveller, who numbers, of the days that are past of his earthly pilgrimage, threescore years and ten; and he may be an "old disciple" as well as an aged man; like Obadiah, he may have feared the Lord from his youth. But will *you* venture to calculate on a life protracted to so advanced a period? Were it possible to do this without infatuation, still would I reiterate in your ears this Divine and gracious requirement, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Eccl. xii. 1. But since you know not whether the year on which you have entered may not be your last, this imperative advice comes to you with an emphasis such as death can give it. Are instances of early death unusual? Has not the king of terrors made many an awful inroad into the circle of your own acquaintance, and your own associates? Are instances of *sudden* death unusual? How often does unexpected disease prey upon the young; and, baffling the utmost efforts of medical skill.